

St. Giles Episcopal Church
February 7, 2010
Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13); 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11
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There are Sundays when we find – if we listen carefully – that the lectionary readings have common themes. Today our lessons have two common themes – the natural and right relationship of human beings to God and being called to God’s service. These scripture readings span thousands of years – from approximately 742 BCE for the passage from Isaiah, to 50 to 58 CE for Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, to approximately 85 CE for the gospel of Luke. Though history and culture have changed so much, I believe that these scriptural themes are absolutely relevant to every one of us today. Let’s take a brief look at each reading.

Our passage from the book of Isaiah is often referred to as the call of Isaiah the prophet. I’d like to focus on the first eight verses – the vision of the heavenly throneroom and Isaiah’s response to his vision of God and God’s call. Isaiah “saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty,” so huge that “the hem of his robe filled the temple.” A worship service is in progress. Heavenly creatures surround God’s throne, saying “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” I’m sure you recognize the language. This is where the Sanctus in our service of Holy Eucharist comes from. Each week we join the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven as we reverently acknowledge God’s holiness.

Isaiah’s response to his vision of God is to say, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Isaiah knows that he is a sinful man, unworthy to stand before the holy Lord. Yet God acts to blot out Isaiah’s sin by touching his lips with a live coal

from the altar. Then, when Isaiah hears God ask “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us,” Isaiah immediately responds, “Here am I; send me!” Unworthy before God, yet called and sent by God, responding with a clear “yes.”

In his letter to the church in Corinth St. Paul alludes to his call. We can read the story in the Book of Acts. While Paul – then called Saul – was actively persecuting the followers of Jesus, he was struck blind on the road to Damascus, and Jesus spoke to him. Through Ananias Paul soon learned what Jesus wanted him to do – first, be baptized and have his sins washed away and then be a witness to the world of his experience of the risen Lord. Paul recognized how unworthy he was to be an apostle, but he was called and sent by Jesus, and he responded with a clear “yes,” working harder than others to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ far and wide.

Finally, we turn to this morning’s gospel lesson. This is an account of events that happened very early in Jesus’ ministry. It is Luke’s account of Jesus calling his first disciples, Simon Peter and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus had gotten into Simon’s fishing boat and asked him to put out a little way from shore so that he could teach the crowds gathered by the Sea of Galilee. When he had finished speaking, Jesus astounded Simon and James and John by the “miracle” of the great catch of fish. Simon Peter’s response to Jesus is very like Isaiah’s response to the vision of God. He fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Simon Peter immediately recognized and acknowledged his unworthiness in relation to Jesus. Yet Jesus called him to be an apostle, to catch people, or in older and perhaps more familiar language, to be “a fisher of men.” Simon and James and John all responded to Jesus’ call with a clear “yes,” leaving their boats and their work to follow their Master.

All three of these passages from Scripture remind us that in relation to God we are all unworthy and sinful; that God nevertheless calls us to do God's work in the world; that our right response to the holiness of God is worship of God; and that our right response to God's call to work is "yes!"

It is unlikely that any of us will have a vision of God like Isaiah's or be struck blind and hear the voice of Jesus like Paul. None of us has had the privilege of being with Jesus during his ministry and seeing his miracles. But each one of us is called to worship God with a humble spirit. And each one of us is called to say "yes" to the work God wants us to do.

How do we know what God wants us to do? How do we discern God's call when we don't have clear visions or hear clear voices? Discernment is a huge topic in Christian spirituality and Christian life. Discernment can be complex and difficult, and we often need the help of others to understand exactly what God wants us to do. I don't want to be simplistic or dismissive of the complexity of discernment. I do want to offer some broad suggestions.

First of all, we need to remember who we are in relation to God. I've said this before. We need to remember that God is God and we are not. We are God's creatures. God has given us all that we have, including the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God. If we want to say "yes," it is best to begin with a humble spirit in relation to God. It is best to keep our attention on God more than on ourselves.

And if we want to hear God's call, we must listen for it. That means being quiet so that we can hear a voice other than our own. We need to pray. We may need to wait

patiently until we recognize the voice that calls us to a particular task in God's service. We need to be attentive to God. And we need to keep our hearts ready to say "yes."

Finally, remember that we have many resources to guide us, resources that can help us as they have helped countless others. Two of these resources are Holy Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer. I urge you to read and meditate on scripture. Take your leaflet inserts home and read them during the week. Make a habit of reading a psalm each day. Read one of the gospels from beginning to end. Lent is coming. You may want to consider taking on Bible reading as a daily discipline during Lent. We will be offering a Lenten Bible study here at St. Giles – you'll hear more about that at announcements – and you may wish to attend that group. Holy Scripture is a foundation of our Christian faith and life. Did you know that at ordination the only belief that each ordinand must affirm by signing a Declaration in public is this: "I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation"? Our church certainly affirms the importance of Holy Scripture!

Another rich resource that we have is the Book of Common Prayer. If you don't have a copy at home, please take one of the prayer books on the table just inside the front door. This book has so much more than the services we use on Sunday mornings. There are forms of morning prayer, noonday prayer, and evening prayer that you can use at home. There is the service of Holy Baptism that you can read to review your baptismal vows and renew your commitment to them. There are prayers for use for a sick person and by a sick person. There is a section of "Prayers and Thanksgivings" that can remind us of what we should be about as Christians – prayers for the human family, for peace,

for our enemies, for social justice, for the parish, for the unemployed. At the end of the prayer book there is “An Outline of the Faith,” a catechism that outlines, in question and answer form, the major beliefs of our church.

God has called each one of us to do God’s work. Being in the world as we are, we need regular reminders of what that work might be. The Bible and the Book of Common Prayer can both help us understand what God is calling us to do. When we hear God’s call, may each of us say “yes” in humility and love. Amen.