



“What the World Needs Now”

Isaiah 6:1-8

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “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!” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

The year was 1982. I had just joined the church the year before, just been baptized as an adult. I was involved in a home Bible study and we were studying, off all things, Spiritual Gifts. Through the inventory of questions that I answered and the discussions from the group, I was beginning to get a sense, for the first time in my life, that I might have some gifts that would lend themselves to some form of ministry. “So, what are you going to do with your life”, someone asked? The seed was planted, I was beginning to hear God’s call. Did I respond, like Isaiah, with the words “Here am I, Lord; send me?”

ABSOLUTELY NOT!

I responded more with something like, “Are you crazy, God? That would mean quitting my job. That would mean moving away from friends and family. That would mean going back to college, maybe even graduate school beyond that. Are you crazy, God?” Why, if someone had told me, even just a year or two before that there was a possibility I might someday be a minister, I would have looked at them in disbelief, laughed out loud, rolled my eyes and probably had a few choice words to say.



Funny thing, though, about seeds that are planted and God’s call in our lives, they keep coming up to the surface of our thoughts. We try to push them down, we try not to listen, we try not to hear, and we try to deny them. Like a child who is trying to avoid the inevitable, we want to put our fingers in our ears, close our eyes and say with defiance, “I can’t hear you”. But once those seeds are planted in the fabric of our subconsciousness, they just keep working on us. They will not go away. Me a minister! Ha! – Ha, ha!

A month or so later, in a casual conversation at work, not even talking about church or religion or God or anything, really, someone just asked the question, “So, have you ever thought about going back to college and finishing your degree?” “Really, God – can’t you just let it go? I’m at work, why are you bothering me here? No, I’m happy where I am. I’m doing fine. I’ve got a good job and a nice apartment. Lots of friends and close to my family. No, no, NO. Leave

me alone!”

Once that crazy thought is there, it just keeps working on you. And so, a few months later, when I finally stopped denying these irritating thoughts and started looking at my life and allowed myself to listen, really listen, and perhaps consider the possibility, I realized that there was this growing dissatisfaction with what I was doing and with where I was in life. My job was good, yes, but was it what I wanted to give my life to? Probably not! Was this really what I wanted to do forever? I don't think so! Could I see myself doing the same thing for the next five or ten years or even beyond? Doubtful! Yes, I had a nice apartment, but there are nice apartments everywhere. Yes, I had a lot of friends but leaving wouldn't end the friendships, just change them. And look at the opportunities I would have for growing more friendships. And yes, moving away from family would be difficult but we would only be separated by miles. Nothing that a dependable car and a tank full of gas couldn't take care of. And so, slowly and gradually, through many conversations with God and others and lots of prayer and time and thinking and listening -- oh, so much listening, I let that seedling grow in my life, I stopped denying God's call, God's voice, and started to think of the possibilities of a future in ministry. “But not seminary, God, no don't want to do that. I just want to do music ministry. I'm not interested in preaching, certainly not interested in ordination, not interested, not interested, not interested -- yada, yada, yada ...

And so here I am today, thirty-six years later (goodness, that makes me feel old). I've been ordained now for almost 28 years, doing something I said I would never do and loving almost every minute of it! I wouldn't change a thing! I have learned over the years that God

often calls us to places that we thought we would never go. And sometimes God will call us to do things that we say we will never, ever do. And sometimes we will deny the calling by sticking our fingers in our ears and screaming “I can’t hear you”. But God is **persistent, even more persistent that we are,** and God continues to call until we eventually listen and respond.

Now hear me on this point, God doesn’t just call us one time, but many, many times over the course of our lives. God calls people over and over again to new tasks and new ministries.



“Our calling is where our own greatest joy intersects with the needs of the world.”
-- Frederick Buechner

One of my favorite all-time quotes is from the American writer, novelist, poet, preacher and theologian, Frederick Buechner, “Our calling is where our own greatest joy intersects with the needs of the

world.” Wherever there is a need and whenever a need arises, God calls people to respond.

It is like the couple who feel their vacation would be best spent not at the beach or the mountains, but on a mission trip in a less desirable place, under less than desirable circumstances, working to build and rebuild from the rubble of a recent disaster, working to bring hope to people in need. Sometimes God calls people do to things that seem out of the ordinary and contrary to popular culture.

It is like the woman who retired from the business world and had the ability to live out the rest of her years in leisure, but instead entered seminary to study for a degree that would allow her to be a pastor of a church. Sometimes God calls people in the least expected time and to the least expected places.

It's like the man who retired from his teaching career, thinking that chapter was over in his life. Until he was called upon to teach the high school Sunday School class. And once again, he was using his gifts for teaching and listening in a new way.

Every day, every moment, God calls people over and over again to respond to the needs of the world. God calls people not just one time, or even just two or three times, but continuously throughout our lives.

Look at the examples we have throughout the Bible of God's calling of people over and over again. They are prophets and teachers, fishermen and tax collectors, men and women, young and old, needy and wealthy, just plain ordinary people like you and me, who are called by God to respond to the needs of the world.

In our Scripture today, Isaiah is already a prophet, called by God to proclaim God's message to the world. He's been a prophet for some time. He's been teaching and preaching and telling the people about God's will for them. And now here in Chapter 6, God calls Isaiah again. In the midst of his prophetic mission, God calls to Isaiah to enter into a new ministry, a different kind of ministry, because the world needs to hear a different word from God.

Isaiah's calling came in the form of a vision. He saw himself standing in the middle of the temple, in the most holy of places. He saw God sitting before him, high and lofty on the throne.

God's presence filled the temple. Seraphs, the divine attendants of God, flew around Isaiah singing praises to God on high. Their voices were so thick and so full that they made the very foundations of the temple shake. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts," they sang.

It was too overwhelming for Isaiah and so he cried out, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips; and live among people of unclean lips; yet I have seen the Lord!" What Isaiah said here is a little play on words. His words, "I am lost," can also mean, "I am silenced," or "I am at a loss for words." Isaiah knew that anything he might say would not be worthy enough for God. His lips were unclean and any words that might come would be inadequate. And so, Isaiah was silenced.

He was a prophet of God, one who spoke on behalf of God, and yet when he stood before God he could not even open his mouth. He was at a loss for words. It seems strange for a man who spent his entire life talking to not be able to say a word. Yet this is exactly what God needed for Isaiah. God needed Isaiah to be quiet long enough to hear what God had to say. God needed Isaiah to listen, not to talk. And so Isaiah was silenced.

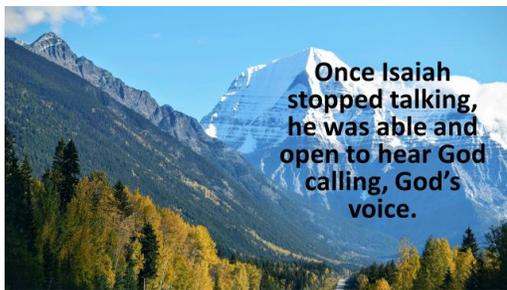
They say people talk the most when they don't know what to say. Like when you want to impress someone but you don't know what to say. So you just start saying something, but then you realize you shouldn't have said it, so you keep talking to cover up what you just said. Then you realize you shouldn't have said that, so you talk even more until you realize you **shouldn't** have said anything in the first place!

We talk to impress people. We talk so people will pay attention to us. We talk so people will think we are important or knowledgeable. Maybe we talk just a little too much. Maybe we

should stand ... with Isaiah ... for a while ... with our lips closed and our ears open to hear what God has to say.

As Isaiah stood silenced before God, he realized who he was and who his people were. He saw how their lips had been unclean and their lives had been just a lot of talk. A seraph flew down to Isaiah with a burning coal from the forgiving altar of God. He touched Isaiah's lips and cleansed them from all uncleanness, forgiving him and opening him up to what God had to say.

And God called to Isaiah and to all who will listen, saying, "Who will go for us? Whom shall I

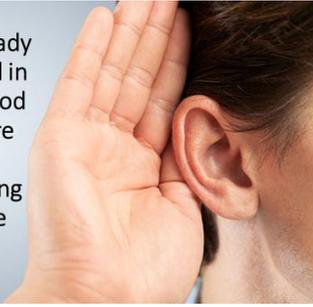


send?" And Isaiah opened his lips for the first time since seeing this vision of God and said, "Here am I, send me!"

You see, once Isaiah stopped talking for a while, he was more able and more open to hear God calling, God's voice.

This is what the world needs ... what the world needs the most is the word of God. We need to hear what God has to say to us, and we have to stop talking long enough to hear it. But be warned: what God has to say may not be what we want to hear. Sometimes what God wants is not what we want. Sometimes what we think needs to be said is not what God says. Actually, most of the time, God will not say what we think God should say. For God tells Isaiah to go into the world and preach not about a better future, but about how things will get worse! God tells Isaiah that the people still will not listen, and they will not open their ears or eyes or their hearts. This is the call of Isaiah. He is called to go into the world to proclaim repentance and judgment to the people. Not likely a message that will win a popularity contest!

We need to be ready and open to stand in the presence of God and listen to where God is calling us, where God is calling this church, where God is calling this community.



Now this call is Isaiah's call, not necessarily our call.

Our call might be totally different. Our call might be to proclaim grace and forgiveness. Our call might be to speak out against war and violence and injustice. Our call might

be to get involved with a local agency to help feed the hungry. Our call might be to care for the sick. Our call might be to share our musical talents. Our call might be to teach a class ... or take a class. Our call might be to comfort those who grieve. Our call might be to work with Habitat for Humanity. Our call might be to befriend a troubled teen. Our call might be to pray. Our call might be to begin a new ministry or enter into a new vocation. Our call will be our own. But we need to be ready and open to receive it: to stand in the presence of God and listen to where God is calling us, where God is calling this church, where God is calling this community. We need to be open and ready, waiting and listening.

As I announced last week, I'm putting together

a sermon series for the season of Epiphany entitled, "Putting the Pieces Together". Discover Your Gifts ... Find Your Place ... Grow in Grace!



What are YOUR Spiritual gifts?
Where do YOUR Gifts fit?

Throughout the next several weeks, I invite you to go on this journey with me ... A journey of discovery as we discover what our own, individual, unique spiritual gifts are and how God is calling us ... calling you, and you, and you ...

to use our gifts ... in our world, our community, in our homes and our jobs and here at church.



Where does
your JOY
intersect
with the
needs of the
world?

Where do our gifts, our joy, our passion, fit into the scheme of things? Where do they fit in God's plan for you? Where is it that your JOY, your GIFTS, your Uniqueness intersects with the needs of the world? It is my hope and prayer that as we

learn these things together, we will indeed grow in grace and understanding and faith. That's my hope and my prayer and I am excited about going on this journey together as we discover how all the pieces fit together.

And so, this week I have some homework for you. I'm going to pass out a Spiritual Gifts inventory for each of you. And I hope that you will carve out some time in this week to come, not a lot, maybe about a half-an-hour or so, to answer the questions and come prepared next Sunday to learn more about Spiritual Gifts and to begin to discover what YOUR gifts are!

Sing: *Here I Am, Lord*