

The Sunnybrook Pulpit

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Listening for the Call

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!' – **Isaiah 6:1-8**

There was once a plane. It was filled with passengers. An hour or so into the flight, the plane hit some severe turbulence, and there was a bright flash of light. The lights in the compartment dimmed momentarily and then came on again. A few minutes passed, and then the pilot came over the intercom, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for flying Reliable Airlines. I'm afraid that I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that we flew through a storm a few minutes back and we were hit by lightning. All of our navigational and communications instruments are shorted out. We have no radio, no compass, no GPS. We have no idea where we are or what direction we are going. The good news is that we do know our airspeed and we are making very good time."

Sometimes life feels like that: we're going really, really fast, but we don't know where we are going or whether we want to go there.

We live in a society that is changing rapidly, and in which we are constantly multitasking, trying to accomplish a lot. We are expected to live at a rapid pace, constantly adapting, constantly responding. Science, technology can help us get where we want to go. They can help us accomplish what we want to accomplish. But how do we know where to go, what to accomplish? The big questions of life are those questions, the religious, philosophical, spiritual questions. What is life really about? What is really important? What is really good?

We have only one life to live, and the question of where we will go with that life is perhaps the most important one we ever have to face. There are lots of answers to that question, and most of them - the conventional but superficial wisdom about getting ahead, making money, being successful – those answers leave people dissatisfied, unhappy, with a deep sense that they are missing something. We need

a deeper wisdom, a steady compass, a clear direction about where to go and how to get there. Where do we get that direction from?

Today, several of you have confirmed your sense that that direction will come in part through a commitment to Jesus and the community dedicated to following his Way. You are making a commitment to a life of faith as part of a community of faith. Sometimes people understand faith in a narrow way, as if to have faith in God means to reject science or other religions or what other people believe to be true. But I want to encourage you to understand faith in the broadest sense possible. Because any God worthy of the name, any God who is the creative source of all that is, any God that is love itself, being itself, the Alpha and Omega from whom all things come and to whom all things will one day return, any God worthy of devoting our lives to, any God worthy of worship, is one from whom all truth ultimately comes, and to whom all truth ultimately points. That means that true faith in him cannot be a narrow faith. A narrow faith points to a partial truth. The fullness of truth has a depth and a complexity that can only be expressed through the language of metaphor, myth and paradox. And such language is not easy to understand. It may, in fact, reveal its meaning only after years of contemplation and life experience.

The passage that we heard read for us tells the story of the call of the prophet Isaiah. He didn't feel worthy of the call, but by the end, he said, "Here I am, send me." Perhaps the details of the story are less important than the idea that God calls. The direction we need is something other than the conventional wisdom which is constantly reinforced by advertising, career counselling, and even (sometimes) our parents. The direction that we need comes from a deep spiritual call, a word that God speaks to each of us, a still small voice that we need to pay attention to hear.

God does not chase you down from outside like a calf roper at a rodeo and force you to do what it wants. God's Spirit is within you, the still, small voice of conscience, creativity and imagination that can easily be overlooked and ignored. God's Spirit is not satisfied to force you to do something you don't want to do. God's Spirit will settle for nothing less than for you to want what it wants, to mourn what it mourns, to love what it loves.

God doesn't just call prophets. God calls all of us. Deep within us is the impulse, the hunger, the thirst towards life in its fullness, that if we are attentive, we will recognize as the call of God. William James defined religion as "the attempt to be in harmony with an unseen order of things" and at their heart, calls are the summons of that unseen order to harmony, integrity and wholeness, to real happiness.

This morning, you who have had your children baptized, you who have confirmed your baptism or joined the membership of this congregation, and you who have witnessed this baptism and added your amen, have responded to a call from God. It may not be clear to you precisely what that call means. It wasn't clear to Isaiah either. You have taken one step along a journey of many miles. The end of the journey is not yet in sight. You will need to be attentive. Do not neglect the means of grace in the church and its worship. Keep listening for the still, small voice. Read with the eyes of your heart. Listen with the ears of your imagination. God will keep calling. God will keep leading. Trust. Be patient.