

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Year C

Isaiah 6:1-13

Psalms 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Where were you when you heard the news of the attack on New York City on September 11, 2001? That was one of those generational incidents that define us. Perhaps you thought nothing like this could ever happen again, especially in your lifetime. In our reading from the prophet Isaiah, we see such a moment in his life - an event that changes the course of his life and work.

Isaiah sets the stage for the event clearly - when it happened and the scene he saw in the Temple. We can only imagine the impact this experience had on Isaiah. Just the vision of God on the throne and the immensity of the presence of God would be humbling, but to experience the Seraphs flying around and the noise of them calling to each other was enough to rattle the doors. It is small wonder that Isaiah cried out "woe is me." The striking piece of this passage is the focus - barely on Isaiah, but mostly on God and the Seraphs. Other than declaring his unworthiness and then his reaction to God, we hear nothing from the prophet.

In Luke's account of the calling of the first disciples, we hear very little from Peter and his companions. Jesus asked Peter to put out to sea a little so He might speak to the crowd and Peter responds without a word. It is only after Jesus had finished talking to the crowd and suggested they put out a little further and let down the nets that Peter spoke. He stated the facts related to a frustrating night of having no success, but agreed to follow the instruction of this man. Like Isaiah, Peter proclaimed his unworthiness of being selected to do something for God.

While there is this one similarity in the reactions of Isaiah and Peter initially, Isaiah gives us an interesting example of how we might want to respond to God. When God asks who should be sent, Isaiah immediately volunteers. Peter also follows when commanded but there is not the sense of eagerness we get from Isaiah. However, for both of these men, the encounter they had with the Divine altered the course of their lives.

Another commonality between these two incidents is the focus on the message they are to proclaim. Isaiah is given a message to confound the minds of his listeners. The people who receive Isaiah's message are not to be able to comprehend what that message means to them. When asked how long he should continue preaching, God tells him to continue until all is lost, until even the remnant is burned. Then, those who are to be raised will be found in the charred remains.

The message Peter and his companions are to take forward is less clear. Jesus tells them that they will be catching people. What is that to mean? If we look at other passages involving fishing, we see the fishermen sorting through the fish, keeping the good and rejecting the bad fish. Their style of fishing is not lethal to the fish - only a prelude to the sorting process. When these early

disciples are told they will be catching people, this is the image they would have - gathering the people prior to a sorting.

We are also called by God for a work. While we might not experience the glory of the Seraphs and the immensity of God in the Temple or the miracle of an abundant catch of fish, we are each called to do a work for the Kingdom of God. And, like the disciples, our calling is related to our talents. Peter knew how to fish, so the metaphor of fishing for people made sense to him. Some of us know how to cook or bake or sew or speak, so our calling from God fits those talents. God did not expect the disciples to learn new talents to be disciples - Jesus taught them building the experiences they already had. Our callings are also based on building on our knowledge and experience to do God's work. It is up to each of us to listen to what God is asking us to do and then use our talents and abilities to further the Kingdom of God.