

SEND ME

Rev. Charles Curley

Isaiah 6:1-8

¹ *In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.*

² *Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*

³ *And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

⁴ *And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.*

⁵ *And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*

⁶ *Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar.*

⁷ *And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."*

⁸ *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."*

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Isaiah 6:8a

It was the year of the dying of the king, when Isaiah saw the Lord,

high and lifted up in the incense-shrouded heights of the sanctuary. When he heard God say, "Whom shall I send?" he replied simply, "Here am I, send me!"

It was the year when the priests robbed the people in the name of God, when Samuel heard the Lord, waking from sleep by the ark in the temple at Shiloh. When he heard God say, "Samuel," he replied simply, "Here I am. . . speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

It was the year when the fish weren't biting, so you worked all day in the hot sun, throwing the nets and pulling them in empty, and you still went home hungry, when Simon Peter fell to his knees, surrounded by flopping, tossing fish, in a boat astonishingly overloaded with the catch of a lifetime and he threw it all away, left it all behind, he and his brothers and their friends, when they heard the simple words: ". . .from now on you will be catching people."

It strikes me that what Isaiah, kneeling on the cold marble floor in the dimly-lit, incense filled shadows of the Temple had in common with Samuel, sleeping by the ark in the sanctuary at Shiloh, and with Simon Peter, kneeling in the sunlit bilge of a boat bobbing up-and-down on the Sea of Galilee, was that all three were confronted unexpectedly, but unmistakably, with the power and presence of God!

Then with no more thought than that of an instant, all three yielded their lives completely to the call, "Whom shall I send?"

What does it mean, "to be called"? Such an experience, we will freely admit, has not often been part of our lives. To be made an offer, give it careful consideration, add up the positives and negatives, consider profit and loss, and in due time come to a decision whether to accept or reject -- this is more what we are accustomed to.

I absolutely hate it when someone comes up to me and says: "Will you do something for me?" They are asking a commitment from me before I know exactly what they want, giving me no chance to consider whether I want to do it or not!

But when God said, "Whom shall I send," Isaiah, for one, never asked, "Where will I be going?"

"Where am I going?" is a terribly important question, a question of planning, direction and goals, but it is a question Isaiah never asked. Isaiah just said, "Send me. It doesn't matter where, it doesn't matter when. Here am I, send me."

That's not the way we work. That's not the way our world works. Perhaps that is the very reason why we so seldom feel we have been "called" to anything! Ask someone why they are a member of a particular church. You are likely to get responses like:

"Well, we looked around, and this one suits me."

"We like the people, they're friendly."

"This has always been my church."

"The music's good."

"The sermons don't put me to sleep. . . too often."

But when was the last time you heard anybody say: "I'm here in this church because God called me and sent me here."

So where is the passion, the amazement, even the fear and trembling before God of hearing that call?

Yet when God called Isaiah in the Temple, Samuel in the sanctuary and Simon in the boat, that summons blocked out all the thoughts and concerns which normally fill a person's head.

Is their experience totally impossible for us to comprehend?

Obviously, I hope not.

Dag Hammarskjold, in his book *Markings*, wrote of a similar experience, and though it happened neither in a Temple nor in a fishing boat, it was no less convicting. He wrote that he did not know exactly how the call came, "But at some moment I did answer Yes to someone, or something, and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful."

Consider the possibility that in this year, not in the year of the death of kings, nor in the year of corrupt priests, nor in the year of the poor catch of fish, but in this year of economic anxieties and political posturing, in this year of job pressures and overloaded schedules, in this year of marital

ups and downs, and kids problems at school . . .in this year, which is, in fact, like virtually every other year from the beginning of creation. . .

Consider the possibility that in this very year God stands before you, somehow, somewhere, in the form of someone familiar or unexpected, and says to you, "Whom shall I send?"

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

And if you find the possibility of hearing those words in a life so overloaded you hardly have time to breathe; if you find the possibility of hearing those words as frightening as I do, then you should know that we are in good company, for that is the very fear that drove Isaiah, Samuel and Simon to their knees.

If being part of the church means you're just here, for a while, and don't quite know why -- then we do indeed have grey days ahead.

But if you can see the possibility that in this very ordinary year you might look up from washing your nets, or wake from a sound sleep, or gaze up into the heights of the sanctuary and here a familiar voice saying, "Come on, there's more to it than this!"

And if hearing those words from our savior you might suddenly realize, "I'm here in this church because God **called me** and sent me here!"

Ah, then!

"Whom shall I send?" God still says to us. I truly believe that the "yes" is within each of us, yearning to break through. I believe that the potential to say yes to God, with passion, with astonishment, with amazement, even with fear, does exist within each one of us.

It exists within us waiting for the unexpected moment when we will hear God's word echoing through the heights and depths of our lives. And we will simply say. . .

That one little moment is worth a lifetime. That one little moment is what we were made for. "Here am I, send me."

Lord of all creation, we confess that we have seldom heard your call in the depths of our lives. We have not been struck speechless in your presence, nor have we left all to follow you. Help us, none the less, to learn to be followers of your way. In the challenges of daily life; in the times that threaten to undo us; when we are overwhelmed and without hope, let us hear your word of comfort and your call to discipleship. May we not be afraid to follow where you lead. In Jesus' name. Amen.