

February 6, 2022  
Epiphany 5-C  
All Saints', Littleton, NH  
The Rev. Curtis Metzger

Isaiah 6: 1-8, 9-13

Psalm 138

Corinthians 15: 1-11

Luke 5: 1-11

When I first set up home with Doug I got use to having chickens....well, at first there was a flock of Guinea hens. Doug has always liked having birds around of some kind—he's had laying hens, those Guinea hens, turkeys and geese. I had never taken care of chickens, but there is not a lot too it. In my first year I had an early morning scare when I went down to feed and water the chickens, scooped out a bunch of cracked corn from the bin with the old coffee can, and when I picked it up in my half-awake stupor, I discovered a mouse in the can. Well, I screamed and I think the mouse did too....and I dropped the can....and then I laughed.

As I tried to get to know the chickens but they were very shy. They always ran away~typical chicken-like behavior. In movies and TV there were those scenes where someone was holding their pet chicken and I wanted to do the same, but they always ran away. One day I was walking behind them as they scattered in front of me and I

was saying, ‘don’t be afraid, your master doesn’t want to hurt you, you don’t have to be so chicken’! Aha!, and then I knew where the saying came from—‘Don’t be such a chicken’!

Well, enough about chickens. Today we have 3 interesting readings that are all about being called and forging ahead with the blessing and confidence of God. The Isaiah passage is the important passage where Isaiah gets his call. It is set in the year that King Uzziah died, which is nearing the end of the Southern Kingdom of Judah’s independence through their ultimate defeat by the Assyrians. It is set somewhat in a vision-like sequence in the Temple. He sees Yahweh lifted up and the hem of Yahweh’s robe filling the temple. Seraphs were in attendance. Isaiah is afraid and says he is a man of unclean lips, then a Seraph takes a coal from the altar—probably where incense was burned—touches his lips and symbolically purifies Isaiah.

The voice of Yahweh calls out asking who should Yahweh send as prophet, and Isaiah says, “Here am I, send me”. (Whenever I hear this passage I always think of Jonathan Daniels, the seminarian from Keene, N.H., martyred in the Civil Rights Movement in the South, who, upon hearing this in a service at Church of the Advent in Boston, discerned his call to ordained ministry.) And then Yahweh gives Isaiah the hard task of ‘speaking truth to power’ in his day. He was to be a prophet

who condemned the people of Israel for their sins and their falling away from Yahweh. He foretold Judah's destruction and their defeat by the Assyrians. For Isaiah to accept this call must have been a very hard task. I'm sure that there were times he was very afraid and felt like running away.

And now on to the Corinthians reading and another story of an unlikely messenger of God. In this chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he retells the basic 'kerygma'~ the core of the gospel : " that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." And he kept on appearing to many others, and finally to him, in his 'Epiphany' on the road to Damascus. And so he became an apostle, though he thinks of himself unfit, much like Isaiah, but he says "By the grace of God I am what I am". He then went on to preach this gospel, this good news, by God's grace. And that proclamation is what motivated him to continue through all of his trials as recorded in the book of Acts. I'm sure there were days when Paul felt defeated and afraid and felt like running away, but by God's grace he endured.

Finally, we have the story from Luke where Jesus teaches Peter how to really fish! Jesus uses a fishing boat that has come in from a nights fishing. Scholars conjecture that the Sea of Galilee was so clean that daytime fishing was difficult

because the schools of fish could see the boats and nets. He uses Simon Peter's boat to get out from shore from the press of the crowd, and to continue to teach them. Then he instructs Peter to let down his nets. Peter complains a little because they were out all night and caught nothing, but complies and lo and behold there is a huge catch—so much they have to call for other boats to come help haul it in.

Peter then has his 'Epiphany' and knows now who Jesus is. He does not think he is just some great fisherman! He falls down and says something similar to Paul and Isaiah—how he is sinful and unworthy, because he knows now that he is in the presence of a holy power. I'm sure that Peter, at this moment, was very afraid and probably wanted to run away. But Jesus says, 'do not be afraid', and, 'from now on you will catch people'. And he left everything and followed him. Jesus had just made him rich with that big catch, but he turned his back on it and followed him.

So three stories of being called or holding fast to the calling, as in the passage in Corinthians. Maybe you don't feel like you have much in common with Isaiah, Paul, and Peter, but you'd be mistaken. For each of us in our spiritual journey we have a 'calling'. It is manifest in different ways with different feelings, but each of us who make a regular habit of being here are following a calling of some kind. Some of us feel it deeply and mystically. Some of us feel like we started following because

of others in our life who invited us...or compelled us!...but we stayed for some reason.

We ask ourselves what is the meaning of life and how should we live. In our faith we find profound truths, or perhaps just inklings that are hard to understand. Sometimes in worship we are moved by the beauty or the thought-provoking notions presented. Maybe, hopefully, frequently we are moved by our fellow followers and how they love and care for us and others. Maybe there is something there that speaks to meaning and purpose.

And maybe, just maybe, in our several and corporate experiences we are reminded of the mystery of the one we call Christ. The one who showed us that sometimes the majesty of God is hid in the cloud of glory in the temple, but who touches our lips with a live coal and purifies us for our mission on earth. Sometimes it is, like Paul, just an amazing awareness of the beauty of the message of Christ's teaching of love and wholeness that unites us all and everything in the universe and offered his life as an offering for all that is wrong, but who overcame death with victorious everlasting life! And sometimes it is an awakening like Peter, where we see Jesus for who he is, we are converted on the spot, we lose our fear and we strike out to follow.

In a world that longs for meaning and purpose, we become the voice and the hands of God. We do this perhaps not in stadiums full of people, but in the way we live and love, and the way we communicate with others the amazing love of God that gives our life purpose and meaning. We believe in the power and goodness of small acts and faithful witnessing to this love of God.

And you now know the moral of the story: When you hear the Master calling you, don't be chicken and run away (!), but turn and be embraced and emboldened to follow God wherever you are called!