

“Send Me”

Isaiah 6:8

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Here in the sixth chapter of Isaiah is his call story. This text invites us to think about God’s call to us: “How did God call you to this place?” You’re a realtor, a stay-at-home dad, a bank president, a business owner, a librarian, a teacher, a high school freshman, a minister. How did God get you here? How might God be using you, or wanting to use you and your gifts for service?

I’ve heard people say it was a voice. One man I know said it happened in a fever. A woman I know put it this way: doors kept closing on her journey, but, she noticed, the low windows were wide open. She thought it was a sign from none other than the most-high God, so she lifted the screen, and she climbed in. Paul Simon wrote his album *Seven Psalms* because he kept getting words in his dreams. The artist Phil Strang dreams scenes and he paints them. I say that’s God’s call. Others call it other things, like synchronicity. Others dumb luck. Some say it’s coincidence. I ascribe to the view that a coincidence is a small miracle when God chooses to remain anonymous.

We Christians believe we are called by God. Some of us are attuned to this idea, some of us not so much.

I’m a minister because after a time it felt like the most natural way to use my gifts, and from a young age I’ve loved the church of Jesus Christ. I’ve loved the people. I’ve loved the courage of the church, I’ve loved the songs, I’ve loved the community, I’ve loved the talk of the church, and the walk of the church. And though the walk is harder than the talk, both are difficult. Speaking the truth in love requires a heart willing to be broken not a silver tongue. I’ve loved the church, the old ladies who squeezed my cheeks and sat alone on their pew missing their late husbands. I’ve loved the ping pong, the heated conversations, the laughter, washing the dishes, the late nights, the midnight silences. For some reason, from the time I was a teenager, I’ve spent a lot of time alone in empty sanctuaries at midnight. You hear things at night, in the silences.

I’ve heard people tell their stories. Lee Stewart was soaked in concrete when he was helping build a church, on leave, in the Philippines, in the Navy. The man filling the forms said, “I’m sorry Lee.” And Lee was overwhelmed by God’s love like an ever-flowing stream of water, except in this case, it was an ever-flowing stream of wet concrete. “Sorry?” Lee said. “There’s no reason to be sorry. We’re building the church of Jesus Christ.” And he stood there wet and weeping.

I’ve been knowing people like Mr. Steward my whole life, people devoted to stoking the fires of their local church. The Les Gradys, the Paul Rundbergs, the Sondra Underwoods. Saints, all. They spoke of their work as their calling. It was where they needed to be. It was what they needed to do.

Don was called to the open road and he drove the eighteen-wheeler for Bluewater Yacht Sales picking up Cal Sailboats on the west coast, J-boats from Rhode Island, and Boston Whalers from, of all places, Florida.

Ron loved numbers and he loved people which is why he loved working at the bank.

Beth loved raising kids and goats which is why she loved being a mom and a youth director at her church.

Martin loves medicine, loves helping people, loves close working relationships, can handle violence and pressure and working against unspeakable odds, which is why he's an emergency room doc.

It's God's call. That's how they describe it. God led them, pushed or pulled them to where they are now. It was a gut thing. It was a good thing. It was a God thing. A calling. The Latin word is "vocare." It means "vocation." It's at the heartbeat of who we are. Our calling might be the job we do (or did) for an income, or not. I've known plenty of new grandparents who have found their truest selves when they hold their grandkids for the first time. And they've found it: Their sweet spot. Their sacred call.

For Isaiah, God made a big scene. Here's the longer story:

Isaiah 6:1-8 ¹In 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. ²Seraphs 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. ³And one called to another and said:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."*

⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And 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!"

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The 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." ⁸Then 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!"

Do you notice in this fantastic passage how Isaiah throws up his hands and says, "Woe is me?" He is a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips. Isaiah is not worthy of God. Isaiah is not capable.

All of that is true enough, I suppose. Outside of God's grace, who is worthy of God?

But God doesn't call us because we're worthy, God calls us because God's got something in mind for us to do and to become.

Do you notice in this fantastic passage what one of the seraphs did? He got a hot coal. Where did he get that hot coal from? From the altar, which symbolizes the most holy of places. Fire is understood in the Old Testament as a means of burning away impurities, impurities like the sin of the human heart. The seraph touches Isaiah with that hot coal. Where? His lips. Isaiah is thereby purified, made ready to speak the holy God's holy word to others.

This scene demonstrates that God doesn't call the equipped; God equips the called. (Sorry for that true cliché.) God prepares us. God enables us. God is able to use us even if we don't think that's possible. By God's grace, we are enough. Because of God's grace, we are more than enough.

Isaiah must have understood this somehow. Because when God asked, "Who will go?" Isaiah raised his hand. Isaiah volunteered. We can appreciate Isaiah's bravery, his naivete, his "yes."

It's a pretty powerful thing to believe that God can and will work God's purposes out through us. God has something in store. God has something in mind.

We should take it seriously. We should take the idea that God wants to work through us seriously. We should take tender care of this calling. We should be good stewards of our calling.

I love the way Martin Luther King, Jr., talks about being good stewards of God's call to us. He famously put it this way:

"If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music ... Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well."

How did God call you to this place? Have you pondered how God has used you, is using you in this world? Have you heard God calling you to do something? Have you been ignoring God? Do you think you're not worthy? When God calls, do you look at your shoe laces? Do you feel something like a flutter in your chest, like a whisper?

When God calls, dare we say yes?

Dare we follow?

I hope so.

With the Spirit's help, have courage. Trust the Lord.

Here am I, Lord. Send me.

Amen.