

*“Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go Lord. If you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.”* The first time I remember hearing this song was on an old cassette tape in my parent’s minivan. I remember thinking that it was a beautiful song. But it took on a whole new meaning for me the first year I attended Annual Conference, then at Messiah College. After watching people who had responded to God’s call in their life be commissioned and ordained to serve God both in the local church and beyond, the giant organ started to play this hymn, echoing throughout the gymnasium. And the Bishop told anyone who was sensing any sort of God to come forward and be prayed over. And friends people came forward. Some with resolute steps. Others with tears streaming down their faces. People responded to the call of God, and have every single year during this service at Annual Conference. The Spirit of God is on the move, calling people.

As we see in today’s text, God is the God of call. Isaiah 6 starts out, “In the year that King Uzziah died.” We hear about Uzziah’s story of ascending to Kingship in 2 Chronicles, chapter 26. A young boy who the people of Judah made king at the age of sixteen. And he started out right - we are told that he sought after the Lord and he feared the Lord as the prophet Zechariah had told him to. But then he grew proud and it was his downfall. He had some amazing success in battles and thought that he had brought it around all on his own, instead of being a servant of the Lord.

In one particularly bold moment of pride, he went to the temple to make a sacrifice - an act of worship that was to be done in a particular way, and next thing you know he was making the sacrifice himself instead of calling for the priests. This was a no-no during the time - for the priests were appointed by God to lead the people as well. When the priests tried to call him out he got angry. As punishment God struck him with a condition of the skin and he died.

It is the background of all that prideful leadership that God is looking for a different type of leader. Not a King - Uzziah’s son had ascended to the throne by this point. But a prophet to lead the people in right paths.

So Isaiah finds himself having a vision of being before the throne of God. Seraphs are all around the throne of the Lord singing praises and all Isaiah could do was fall on his face. He knows that he is not worthy to be in the presence of such a holy and wondrous God. He is a man of unclean lips - in other words he isn’t holy enough - and he lives among people who he knows to be just as unholy.

But then this amazing thing happens. One of the seraphs that had been worshipping God brought a hot, burning coal and touched Isaiah’s mouth with it as a sign of cleaning. And God asked “Whom shall I send?” And Isaiah responded send me.

In contrast to Uzziah who seemed to have forgotten that he was an earthly ruler, here is Isaiah who realizes that it is not by his own strength or gifts that he is called - but only by the grace of God.

Now if all we take away from Isaiah is his particular call, I think we are missing the point. For not all call stories are going to happen like Isaiah. In fact, I’ve heard hundreds of call stories over the years and I have never heard two that sound exactly the same. Even those folks who come forward at Annual Conference, they would each tell the story of God meeting them and calling them differently. For God speaks to our hearts in different ways.

But what we can glean from Isaiah’s call is that worship is the setting of call. Now I know that simply saying the word worship conjures up all sorts of images for us of being in a

certain place and doing certain things. But we worship when we are fully present and pour our hearts out to God. When we are open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. So we may be in the Church building, but not really be worshipping God. Or we may be somewhere we have never been before, praising God, and that can be a moment of worship.

Certainly Isaiah had a profound experience of worshipping God that sounds similar to that which we read throughout the book of Revelation. When we worship God we remember that God is holy and we are not. But here's the thing about when we truly worship God, opening up our spirits - God changes us. Friends, we do not have the power to change on our own. It is only the work and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives that can do that. But it is also a lot easier for God to change us when we are open to being changed, or in Isaiah's case, cleansed. Does that mean that God does not ever meet those who are resistant? By no means. But Isaiah recognized that he was unworthy and had a moment where God changed him and called him because of the posture of his heart.

In fact, Isaiah teaches us a lot about what worship can look like. For him he had this time of confession - crying out that he had unclean lips. He received forgiveness - symbolized here by the burning coal. And then he is commissioned - or sent out to the people.

Sounds a lot like our worship does it not? That we bring our confessions before God - we cry out for the times we have not chosen God, when we have sinned. We seek forgiveness and then we are sent. And here's the thing friends - we are always sent. If we have been changed by Christ, we are his disciples. And disciples have a mission from God. How we live into that mission - our specific call - may be different. But we are all sent to be proclaimers of the Gospel.

That's part of the great mystery of call. The most holy God calls even the likes of you and me, despite our unworthiness, to serve the Kingdom. It still boggles my mind. And it can be so hard to understand. But God is the God of call. The question is how are we going to respond?

Something that has been on my heart this week is the following question - what if Isaiah would have said no? Of course, we know that Isaiah said 'yes' to the call of God. But how would the history of the people of Israel been different if he would have walked away? Or if he would have not responded to the forgiveness of God?

I wonder that, because I think sometimes we get so caught up in imagining all of the details that come with saying 'yes' that we talk ourselves into saying 'no'. But those 'no's may just be a 'no' to someone hearing the Good News and having their chance to respond. Or that 'no' may have more consequences than we can ever wrap our minds around.

I want to take time this morning to pray. To pray over each of us about hearing and responding to the call of God. I don't know the specifics of what God may be calling you to my friends, but I do know this - our God is the God of call. Are we willing to respond "send me"? Amen.