

Isaiah 6: 1-13, Luke 5: 1-11 Our Regenerative God

In 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. Seraphs 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. And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’

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

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

Then 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!’

And he said, ‘Go and say to this people:

“Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.”

Make the mind of this people dull,

and stop their ears,

and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes,

and listen with their ears,

and comprehend with their minds,

and turn and be healed.’

11 Then I said, ‘How long, O Lord?’ And he said: ‘Until cities lie waste

without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate;

12 until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.

13 Even if a tenth part remains in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled.’

The holy seed is its stump.

As persons of faith who are committed to serving and obeying God, usually when their people are going through some national crisis, the prophets in the Bible have much to teach us. Last week in Jeremiah’s “call narrative,” we learned a few things about what happens when God calls us, the imperfect human vessels, to be part of God’s perfect plan.

For one thing, God calls us even when we don’t feel we are ready or have what it takes to do God’s will. Jeremiah gave God a good reason why he can’t be the one for this task: he doesn’t know how to speak, because he is too young. God responded by touching Jeremiah’s lips and putting God’s words in his mouth, literally “spoon feeding,” him, and says “that’ll do it.” God takes responsibility for having chosen you and called you, by empowering you. When God calls, God also transforms us, so we are fit to serve.

Prophet Isaiah's call narrative Yvonne just read to us teaches us something more. Isaiah was a prophet in the original Jerusalem Temple in the 8th century BCE. He was an "official" prophet for the king in the royal court, and the death of this particular king of Judah, King Uzziah, marked the beginning of an era when Israel started to lose its independence.

The Scripture reminds us that God interacts with God's people in real time, in our social, political and personal realities. God's Word is eternal but God's message confronts us in the particularity of our human circumstances. God is indeed present in our daily realities.

In today's passage, Isaiah is in the temple and has a vision of God sitting on the throne, but God is so majestic that just the edges of God's robe fill the whole temple. And what filled the space where Isaiah stood was the utter holiness of God as the heavenly creatures declared. God's pure goodness so overwhelmed Isaiah that he confessed, blurting out "I am undone!" He confessed that he not only had unclean lips himself but also lived among a people of unclean lips. Isaiah might have been a designated Temple prophet, but he knew he was no holier than the people to whom God sent him.

I wondered to myself... how often do I ponder on God's holiness; unadulterated, untainted goodness and wholeness. I must confess I am not capable of even imagining it... are you? And yet, how quick I am to distance myself from the unholiness I perceive in others; how eager I am to separate my unclean lips from the unclean lips of others. What would it mean for me to say, "I live among a people of unclean lips." To see myself for who I truly am.

All too often, we humans look back in our history and condemn the mistakes earlier generations committed; the uglier the mistake, the more ardently we distance ourselves from *their* mistakes, forgetting that our world is but an extension of theirs, that their story is our story. But Isaiah teaches us that it is in our confession of our guilt that we receive God's healing touch.

Hearing Isaiah's fearful confession, one of the heavenly creatures comes down and touches Isaiah's "unclean" lips with the burning coal from the holy altar. Then, Isaiah *hears* the liberating words that this Divine act freed Isaiah from his guilt. It is God's doing, but it was Isaiah's confession of who he was that enabled him to be healed.

Having healed and transformed, Isaiah eagerly volunteers when he *hears* God wondering to themselves, "who would go for us?" "Here am I. Send me!" There he was, Isaiah, who was so afraid that he was undone because he had seen God, now boldly steps out of his fear and steps up to carry out whatever God would have him do! This is the power of God's Word

Thanks to Isaiah, we know that God does not call us because we are “holier” than others. Rather, God reveals to us God’s uncompromised holiness to evoke in us humility and awe needed for our transformation.

But little did Isaiah know the message he would be given to bring to his people. Isaiah is given a harsh and uncompromising message to deliver, one that would *prevent* repentance and set judgment into motion. He is to prevent repentance: “so that they may not look, ... listen, ... comprehend, ... and turn and be healed.” Oops!

This may be one of the most challenging words in the Scripture for us to hear. Instead of deliverance, destruction. It goes against the nature of God we read elsewhere in Scripture; God of everlasting mercy, lovingkindness, forgiveness and compassion.

But let us listen carefully to God’s words. Here God tells Isaiah “Go and say to *this* people...”. Which people? The message has a targeted audience. We’ll find God’s anger against “this” people in Chapter 5, right before today’s passage: ‘Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, Ah, you who drag iniquity along with cords of falsehood, Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd in your own sight! Ah, you who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights!

Yeah, once upon a time, such people wielded power, replacing God’s truth for their falsehood, if you can believe it. They were who God meant by “this people.” Isaiah is to bring God’s message of destruction to them. Remember, God addresses people in real time and space, living their particular historical moment. This is not God speaking to God’s people “in general,” but to “this people” living at this moment, disobeying God’s law to love your neighbor as yourself, and to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God, but instead are turning away from justice and hating mercy, and thinking themselves to be wiser than God.

Remember also, our God is holy. God’s uncompromising holiness does not tolerate such death-dealing injustice, lies and hate. God has God’s enemy in Evil, and God puts an end to its rule.

Curiously, at the very end of this message of doom is a line that reflects a glimmer of hope: “The Holy Seed is its seed.” And that’s how this Divine message ends. Like the entire Hebrew Scripture, the book of Isaiah was written over a long time, roughly two hundred years,

by several different authors, at least three. The original Isaiah was such an impactful prophet that others continued to write in his name; Isaiah was sort of a brand-name prophet. Most scholars think that this hopeful note at the end of otherwise utterly damning message was added there by a later editor. But it is not for the purpose of “softening” the harsh pronouncement of God against evil; it is not a compromised hope; the end did come to them; God’s judgment for “this people” in the age of evil was just that. However, that was not the end of the story of God and God’s people. Later generations witnessed how God brought life out of desolation put the truth of God’s covenantal faithfulness in that line.

Our God is a God of Regeneration, bringing life out of death. God has shown us that in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and through him our individual life and the life of the world. At specific moments in human history, the world seems so lost, unholy and unclean, but God puts an end of the rule of Evil. And to that end, God regenerates the individual lives of God’s servants, as Jesus does to his followers. Now I’m going to read the Gospel, but don’t worry, I’m not going to preach a 2nd sermon. Instead, I invite you to listen for the regeneration happening in this story where Jesus calls his disciples. Listen for the reality of despair and scarcity in the soon-to-be disciples’ lives, and how the words Jesus spoke brought life and abundance. Hear now, the good news of Jesus Christ according to **Luke 5: 1-11**

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ 5Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ 6When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ 9For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ 11When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God,