

Isaiah 6:1-8

A Vision of God in the Temple

⁶In 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!’

⁶ Then 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!’

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

⁵Once 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 signalled 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.

Your Deep Gladness

Have you noticed in the last week or so that the mornings are starting to become cooler? Darkness now falls before 9, and not after. Some of the leaves are thinking about changing color, and football season is officially underway. The long, leisurely days of summer are drawing to a close, and we are back into the busyness of fall. This weekend marks the unofficial end of summer – it is Labor day weekend. Ironically, this weekend that we think about the labor we do is one marked by rest, play, vacation, travel and gathering with family and friends. There is no work on the Monday we celebrate the labor we do, but rather a day off to have a break from work. But, work is what we will be looking at today – work that we all engage in in our everyday lives. I invite you to explore with me the Reformed theology surrounding our vocation and call, to consider who calls you, and to what are you called, and how when we allow God to fulfill us, rather than work, we can experience the deep gladness in our souls that comes from serving God.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism is one of the eleven documents in our Book of Confessions. These creeds, catechisms, declarations and statements were written over the life of the church to affirm what we believe. The Shorter Catechism begins with this question: “What is the chief end of [man]?” The answer: “To love God and enjoy him forever.” This statement describes our Christian Vocation – a life of joyful service to glorify God. God calls us to not only our jobs, if we have them, but to our life work and a life of service in all that we do. John Calvin and Martin Luther – two of the reformers you hear mentioned most often when we think

about the Reformation – advanced the belief that God calls every person to a vocation that serves and glorifies God.¹

The word vocation is from the Latin word *vocare* and means “to call”. Inside the church, we hear this language and think of those called to Christian Vocation – to be pastors and elders and deacons and other leaders, or to participate in full time Christian ministry. Outside the church, “vocation” is equated with a job – what do you do for a living? But, in the reformed tradition, “vocation” is so much more than what you do every day as a job outside the home, or inside the home caring for it. If you crack open your Book of Order to chapter 5, vocation for us is laid out in several paragraphs, ending with this statement, “*for Christians, work and worship cannot be separated.*” God calls a people to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and savior – a profession we all make at baptism confirmation, or reaffirmation of faith. We are called to follow Jesus in obedient discipleship and use the gifts and abilities God has given us to honor and serve God in our personal life, in our households and with our families, in our daily occupations, in our community, nation, and in the world. We respond to our call from God and our belief in Christ through the ministries of God’s people in and for the world. God calls us to honor and serve God in all parts of our lives – in our work and in our play, in our thought and in our actions, and in our private lives and public relationships. We believe that work and worship, life and worship, cannot be separated.² This means our vocation is not our everyday jobs – be they paid or unpaid – but our everyday lives. God calls every one of us to continually worship God in all that we do.

¹ Myers, Marcia Clark. “What do Presbyterians Believe about Vocation?” Presbyterians Today, 2007.

² BOO (Old form of Government) G-5.6000, as quoted in PC(USA) Resources for Christian Vocation Sunday, written by Elder Michael Kruse.

Our scripture readings for today are 2 of the call stories in the Bible. When I was in seminary, and in the call process, we heard a lot about call stories. It was in the air. You had to tell your call story to your session and presbytery multiple times as part of the ordination process. We looked at call stories in the Bible for preaching classes, to talk about why we were called, and to what we were called. We told our call stories to nominating committees, and to church congregations. And I still have occasions when I tell my call story. When do you tell yours? You have one, you know. God calls each of us – each of us has a call story. Some are obvious moments when you knew that God was calling you to a certain occupation, to raise children, to work in a specific area or serve in retirement. Others are quieter and less easily noticed, or unclear and hard to discern. What we notice when we look at all of the call stories in the Bible is that God did not call people to a certain job. Nowhere does God say “for your job, you will be a computer programmer.” Even if computers were around, that would not have been the call. The call, in all of the instances in the Bible where we see a call is to go and serve God in a unique way using gifts and skills given to us by God. In our reading from Isaiah for today, we see Isaiah being called by God to serve as a prophet and proclaim God’s word. Isaiah has a vision in which God is too big to fit into the temple – in fact the hem of God’s robe fills the temple. God is being attended by seraphs - -creatures that looked like cobras but with six wings. Isaiah is considered unclean after seeing God – even just the hem of God’s garment, and a hot coal is placed in his mouth to purify him. Only then did he hear the voice of God ask, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah immediately replies – “Here am I, send me”. And, at this point in any worship service where this text is used, we all break out into the song Here I am Lord. It is a great call song, but do we know where we offer to go when we say, “I will go Lord, if you lead me?” Isaiah didn’t know. He just knew that this vision had been for him, and

it is in the next verse – of the Bible, not the song!, when he hears that he is being called to deliver a hard message to the people of God. Isaiah’s vocation is that of Prophet - -to serve God by sharing his word, no matter how hard, to people who probably do not want to hear it.

Isaiah’s call story would probably go into the category of “confusing,” if we organized call stories into categories. Another interesting call story is ours today from Luke, when Jesus calls Simon to be what we might call a “second career” individual. Simon’s first job was as a fisherman. He had probably done this for most of his working life, and given that he had not yet died from starvation, we can safely assume that he did a pretty good job at it. But one day, Jesus comes along and changes his life. Jesus calls him to stop fishing, even after showing him how to bring in a better haul, and instead follow him and fish for people. Simon Peter did not hesitate when Jesus called him to follow, but probably had no idea what was in store. Simon Peter was not wanted for his job as a fisherman, but was called to a vocation of discipleship and to be, a follower of Christ.

Last month I was away for a continuing education event. The Young Clergy Women Project spent 3 days thinking about questions of call and vocation. What I did not expect was to see God’s call to someone shown as clearly as I did in our shuttle bus driver. In a 14 passenger van full of clergy women, his certainty that he was doing the work he was supposed to be doing shone through. The ride was about 8 minutes between our hotel and the Divinity school. The driver introduced himself jovially as Mike and greeted each of us warmly as we climbed aboard the van. As we drive the route, Mike told us about himself, while giving a highly spirited tour of the Duke Campus. As we drove on the west side of campus, we asked Mike about the statue we had passed numerous times - -a lifesize camel with a single hump seeming to listen to a man.

“Oh, the camel statue. That was put there to remember the professor who thought he discovered single humped camels. Everyone knew about 2 humped camels, but he thought he was the first to see one with only one hump. In fact, he was so certain of this fact that he actually tried to name the camel – you know, give it a scientific name. But when he went to register his new animal, he found that someone else had already named it. He found out the hard way that just because he had never seen it before did not mean it didn’t exist. Why that gets a statue, I have no idea.” We laughed and he continued to visit with us.

It turns out that Mike actually *loves* being a shuttle driver. “I love my work. I get to take strangers to new places, show them my city, and help them have a good time. I enjoy taking care of the vans, keeping them maintained and worked on. I’m a mechanic, and so I can be of use here. I don’t want to be a supervisor and in charge of the people. I don’t want to have to tell people what to do or deal with the politics or make the schedules. I want to drive folks and show them something new. We have a lot of people who stay at our hotel because of how close we are to the medical center. Families, patients, kids – you name it. If I can make a bad day a little brighter, then I will. If I can show them some comic relief, give them something to smile about or a story to tell, then that makes both of our days brighter. The camel story – the kids love it! It is a good memory of what can be a bad time for some of them.” Mike’s words rang in my ears that night when we returned to the hotel and a little boy who had been there since our arrival jumped out of the shuttle van behind us. He was obviously a patient at the medical center – his T-shirt said so. As he jumped out of the van, he gave Mike a high five and said “see you tomorrow Mike!”.

Mike probably would not say he was called to be a shuttle bus driver - -he fell into it by accident. Yet his vocation of sharing hospitality and humor to strangers who are far away from home was a gift to that little boy, and to us on our trip. Presbyterian minister and author Frederick Buechner is known for much of his writing. Perhaps one of his most famous quotations comes from his writing about vocation. Buechner writes, “There are different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than society, or say, the superego or self-interest. By and large, a good rule for finding out is this: The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work that (a) you need to do and (b) that the world needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you’re presumably meeting requirement (a), but if your work is writing cigarette ads, the chances are you’ve missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you’ve probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you’re bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a), but probably aren’t helping your patients either. Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. *The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.*”³

Mike’s deep gladness – providing hospitality and comfort and transportation to people meets the hunger of the world. For a traveler to have a conversation beyond the check-in counter, for a child to hear the story of the camel statue on his way to yet another doctor and yet another test. The hunger for compassion in a hard world. Some days, your deep gladness may shine through. Your deep gladness to shape the lives of children meets the needs of the world to have children cared for. Some days, well, not so much. When your deep gladness is living your

³ Buechner, Frederick. *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC’s of Faith*. Harper Collins, 2004. P. 404.

life in the worship of God, then you can't help but meet the deep hunger of the world. Not all of us love our jobs, some of us wish we had jobs, but our jobs are not our vocations – God does not call us to jobs, God calls us to worship and service and to a vocation of discipleship. One of our new officers shared a story with us during officer training, and has given me permission to share it here with you. He works in the financial industry, and described the day a client came into his office to transact some business. The business completed, the client began sharing some personal struggles that were happening, and some hard times their family was going through. Our officer tells us that he had no idea what to say, but that God gave him the words to say what was needed to ease the pain of his client. I believe in that situation, and in that moment, the call was not to the stock market, but to be there for someone in their time of need and offer a word of comfort. Reflecting on the encounter, he said: “I think whenever someone speaks from the heart, it's as if God is taking over. Sometimes you don't know what to say, and He just fills in the blanks.”

We often fall into the trap of believing that our work defines us. It is unavoidable in a society that often follows up the questions of “what is your name” with “what do you do for a living?” When we fall into the trap of believing that our work defines us, we also fall into the false belief that our work should be what fulfills us. How many late nights have you spent working on a project because you want the sense of accomplishment of finishing it, or have you mourned not finding the right job, or a job that is good enough? Those of you who stay at home and have the impossible job of raising children and maintaining the household – do you find your identity there? These things will not fulfill us. The title of CEO or Parent of the Year will not

make us whole. God fulfills us. God provides us with the sense of accomplishment and completion, the knowledge that what we do is important.

No matter who you are, you are called by God. You are called to find the place where your deep gladness – what brings you joy meets the hunger of the world. That may not be easy some days. It may not produce a paycheck. However, when we live our lives as a vocation – when we live our whole lives in service and worship of God, it is hard not to find ways where what brings us, and God joy also meets the needs of the world. Each and every one of you has a vocation. You have a call. Our work and worship cannot be separated - -our vocation is to love God and glorify him forever. As we think about going back to “work” on Tuesday, after a time of Sabbath, consider your vocation, your call to discipleship. How is God using your deep gladness to meet the hunger of the world? How are you answering the call to a vocation of discipleship? Amen.

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