

Title: "Here I am Lord. Send me!"

Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13)

Our hymn of the day "Here I am, Lord" by Dan Schutte is one of my favorites. It comes from Isaiah 6:8

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!" "Here am I, send me!"

I believe it celebrates the commitment of anyone who has felt the call of God. For me, it was symbolic of my response 30 years ago to the calling I felt to the pastoral ministry. I was hot fired to serve God! "Here am I, send me!!!"

As exciting as such a response to the call of God might sound, it was not till later that I understood the full meaning of those words. In fact, Isaiah himself prefaces those words with a warning. When he is confronted by the presence of God, he doesn't boldly come before God professing his commitment. Rather, he wails "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips." And I understand him. Long ago at my installation service as pastor at Immanuel First the district president, Larry Stoterau, was preaching. At the time, I thought, "I've hit the big time." "The district president...!!" However, when the time came for him to preach he began the sermon with these words "Your pastor is a man of unclean lips". Silence.... Silence... A twitter of nervous giggles filled the sanctuary. I remember the blood rushing to my face... "Ah, sir,... where are you going with this?" "Your pastor is a man of unclean lips." And then he quoted the vision given to the prophet Isaiah, recorded in chapter 6, our Old Testament reading for today.

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." ⁸ 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!"

Isaiah is having a vision, where he meets God. Now, to come face-to-face with God means death. The unclean, the imperfect cannot stand before the perfect almighty God. Like a cloud of smoke, we are blown away, we are undone, before the mighty wind of God. The unclean cannot stand before God. Isaiah, knew his personal uncleanness before God, and though he was called by God to speak prophecy to Israel, in the presence of the glory of God, he could see that

he was unworthy. All that he had said, even in the service of God, was unworthy. He was a man of unclean lips. But then an angel comes and puts a burning coal to his lips. Burning coals are symbols of purification. Despite his uncleanness, God was going to purify the words Isaiah spoke. Isaiah's prophecy would be clean because they were the words of God.

This was what President Stoterau meant when he said: "Your pastor is a man of unclean lips." When I stand before you, sharing the Gospel, by themselves the words of Mason Okubo are unclean, unworthy vessels of God. I am a man of unclean lips. But when I share the Gospel, my words have been purified. When I share the Gospel, my words, my preaching is clean because they are the Word of God. The coals of the Gospel has purified my speech. This is the symbolism of the clerical that I wear. The black of my pastor's uniform symbolizes sin and death. I am a man of unclean lips. I am a man of unclean body I am a man of unclean spirit. But the white collar, symbolizes that, as a preacher, the words I preach are clean because they are the Word of God. For this reason, it is of ultimate importance that the words I speak are from scripture. Only then will the words I speak be clean. So, I wear my Pastor's uniform as a symbol of my calling, to share the clean words of the Gospel.

In a bigger sense, it is not only me who is allowed to speak words of cleanliness. Any Christian who shares the Gospel, speaks words which are clean. Amen! And it is here that God asks "Whom shall I send?" Who shall I send out to share the clean words of the Gospel? "Who will go for us?" It is here then that Isaiah shouts out "Here am I." "Send me!" In fact, that should be the response of all Christian. We should all be like Isaiah, shouting Here am I, send me. send me. Amen,

But you know as well as I know, "talking about sharing of the Gospel" is one thing. "Actually doing it" is another. Isaiah himself, all of Israel, too, was struggling with it. You see, in the reading from Isaiah something bad has happened. King Uzziah has died. Uzziah had been a great king over Israel. There had not been another king like him since Solomon. Under Uzziah's leadership the nation of Judah had grown to its peak. Under his leadership Judah had known prosperity, peace and stability. So, when King Uzziah dies the people of Israel lost hope.

But God didn't want to leave them there. God brought a word of Hope. So, on the loss of King Uzziah, God sent Israel a vision of THE King. He wanted Israel to know there was still a KING of Israel watching over them, protecting them. There was still a King of Israel, in the Heavenly realms, the Sovereign of all the earth, whose kingdom will never end. So, by sending the vision of the throne he was essentially saying to Isaiah, even though things look bad now... it will all work out. "I have a plan for your future." "Will you join me in this plan?" "Who shall we send?" And it is here that Isaiah stands up and says "Here am I, Lord." "Send me!" "Send me."

The words of the prophet Isaiah are to encourage US as well. In this 21st century, the greatest challenge which the church faces is not persecution by those against God. Rather, the greatest challenge we face today is living in a world where God is not taken seriously. It is not even that

people are against God. It is not that they hate God. Rather, for many, God is a non-issue. God is not part of their daily lives. They are apathetic. Sin makes them blind to God, and so they live as if He is not there. They live in sin, not even realizing they are living in sin. They are people of unclean lips, and do not even know what unclean means.

But ignorance does not excuse. Ignorance does not change the fact that the Lord IS there. The Lord is there, surrounded by Angels singing Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord. And there will come a time when all will see him, all will see him and will kneel before him. They will kneel in joy, or kneel in judgment. And the number of people in this situation is not small. According to George Barna, 1/3 of Americans are unchurched. 20% of those who have church membership believe that they can get to heaven by doing good works. This means that over 53% of Americans have not put their faith in Christ's work of salvation. Over half of everyone you run into are in danger of judgment... and it is a growing population.

This is horrible. Horrible, but there is still hope. The good news is that while we are here on Earth, that Judgment has not been passed. There is still time. The vision WE have been given is not one of despair and loss for "those who do not believe." Rather the vision we have been given is one of hope. We are called "to harvest a field white with ripeness." We are being called to be the second chance for all those who do not yet know Jesus. God calls us not to look in judgment upon those who presently reject Jesus, but rather to have pity on them. The most important work we have is to reach the lost people of the world with the Gospel... with the word of God, with Baptism and with the Lord's supper.

But when we are faced with Barna's statistics we can be daunted. I mean, what can we do with such numbers of people? The answer to that is... Jesus calls us to look upon this challenge with new eyes. When Jesus looked out at the multitude he did not see their poor state. He was not daunted by the enormity of their need. Rather He saw potential. Jesus did not focus on the hopelessness of the situation but he focused on hope. Jesus did not have pity and compassion and then "do nothing." Instead he said "get the sickle and harvest them." Jesus did not see the multitudes as always being in that situation, enslaved by fate. Rather, he saw them being transformed. Jesus was not daunted by the numbers because He had a vision of "what they could be." He saw the lost being saved. He saw sinners becoming saints. He saw the guilty being set free. He saw the unforgiven being forgiven. He saw people deserving hell, but instead, getting grace. When you see people who do not have a personal relationship with Christ and I'm sure each of you know someone, my question is, "How do you look at them?" Do you also see them as potential saints? Jesus calls us to look upon the multitude and see the potential in the world. Jesus calls us to see, to have a vision of the lost being saved, sinners becoming saints, the guilty being set free, the unforgiven being forgiven, people deserving hell but instead getting grace, enemies of God becoming children of God. Jesus is calling us to a vision like Isaiah. No matter how daunting this world looks, there was still a King of Heaven, Sovereign over all the earth whose kingdom will never end, who has a plan, who asks us, "will you be part of my plan?" The harvest is plenteous. God has a plan. God is asking us to be part of his plan.

So, what is the first step of our response? The first thing to do, as in all things is pray. Why must we pray? Because this is God's work. What is impossible with men is possible with God. That which is numerically impossible for us to harvest, is possible for God. Only he can heal the lame, only he can raise the dead, only he can heal the sick, only he can cause deaf ears to hear, only he can cause dead tongues to speak, only he can give the spiritually dead heart saving faith. And it will be only God who will be able to raise the laborers to reap the harvest. In this 21st century, this is our greatest challenge. Our first step is to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers. However, we cannot ask God to send forth someone else without first saying, "Here am I, Lord, send me, send me."

Please pray with me... Lord Jesus, God of the Harvest, Grant us compassion and pity for the lost. Grant us the vision of the transformation which you alone can do. Give each and every one of us a chance to share the Gospel with lost souls we meet today. Here we are Lord, send me, send me.