

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Intro

Today's readings focus on the response of those who hear the call of God.

Often, when we read of these call stories in the Bible we can see that they fall into a pattern.

The pattern generally goes something like this:

- first there is an experience of the HOLY
- which is usually followed by a swift objection and a claim of unworthiness by the person being called – that God couldn't possibly mean them
- then comes a reassurance – that yes, God does mean them
- and finally, some kind of sign that the person is truly called
- and the response of being sent

We can see how this is played out in our first Lesson – the story of the call of the Prophet Isaiah.

## I. Three Calls

A. Isaiah's call takes the form of a vision that unites heaven and earth, as he prays in the Temple.

1. Isaiah has an experience of God enthroned in the temple.
2. But God cannot be contained within the walls of the building, for just the hem of God's robe fills the temple.
3. And in step two of the pattern – Isaiah responds to this experience with a profound sense of his own unworthiness.
4. He laments, "*Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...*"

5. Isaiah is then reassured as one of the seraphs touches his mouth with a flaming coal and says,

- *“Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”*

6. Thus, Isaiah is given a sign that he is freed to hear and speak God’s word.

7. Now that his sin has been purged – Isaiah is ready to respond.

8. When the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

- Isaiah responds, “Here am I; send me!”

B. We can also see this pattern at work in the call of Simon Peter from our Gospel lesson.

1. In contrast to the heavenly vision of Isaiah’s call – the call of Peter, James and John comes in the course of their everyday occupation as fishermen.

2. Here’s Peter – Mister Rough, Tough Fisherman;

- Mister thinks he knows everything.

3. Jesus tells Peter, after he finishes teaching from his boat, to put out into the deep water and let down the nets again.

4. Peter’s response is, “Yeah, yeah, been there – done that – not doing it again.”

5. But in the end, he takes the boat out and lets down the net, and they end up with so great a catch of fish that it takes two boats to bring it all in – and even then there’s so much they almost sink.

6. Once again, God’s extravagant abundance is shown in this huge catch of fish.

7. Peter’s immediate response to this brush with the HOLY is to cry out, “Get away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

8. So, steps one and two – an experience and a response of unworthiness.

9. Peter is then reassured as Jesus tells him – **“Don’t be afraid;** from now on, you work for me – you are going to catch people.”

10. And Peter, James and John respond to this call by leaving EVERYTHING and following Jesus.

C. We hear these same elements in our N.T. Lesson as well, as St. Paul writes about his call.

1. See if you can find them.

2. “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain.”

3. And because Paul answered that call – Jesus’ message of God’s love was spread all over the known world.

## II. Our Call

A. So what we have are three very different calls, each containing the same elements.

1. In each case there is an experience of the HOLY – followed by a claim of unworthiness – then, a sign that the person is truly called – and a response.

2. God takes these people and with a SIMPLE YES is able to use them to further God’s work in the world.

3. Each of them is called from their daily life – doing their everyday work – to do something new – to do something powerful – to do something of God.

4. And so are we.

B. How often does our call from God fit into this pattern?

1. How often in our daily lives do we have a brush with the HOLY – receive some kind of call from God?

2. And how often is our RESPONSE that same sense of unworthiness like Isaiah or Peter?

3. “Who me, God?” “You can’t mean me.” “I think you might have me mixed up with somebody else.”

4. And then, just when God is ready to step up with the next part – with the reassurance we so desperately need – we walk away.

- Or, if we were honest with ourselves – we RUN.

5. But you know what – God doesn’t give up – in fact, God’s patience is endless – so God keeps coming back and coming back – until eventually our resistance cracks just the tiniest bit;

- and then God overcomes our doubt with an amazing gift of generosity and grace.

6. The question for us is – what is our response going to be?

C. God IS going to call – indeed, God calls us all the time.

1. Usually, it’s not in some earth-shaking event such as Isaiah’s call in the temple.

2. Our call is much more mundane and down to earth.

3. Peter, James and John were just going about their everyday life when they heard the call of God.

4. And God’s call to US is the same as it was for them: “Go for me – fish for people.

5. That’s it – that’s all there is to it.

6. God puts us in an everyday situation – gives us the gifts and skills we need – and then says, “Fish for people.”

7. The question for us is – Are we even brave enough to bait the hook?

### III. Telling the Story

A. So what it comes down to is this – How are we being called to bring people closer to God?

1. How are YOU being called to bring people into a deeper relationship with God?

2. And how can we as a church help you to answer that call?

3. Do you remember those wild Cal Worthington commercials, “with his dog spot”?

- The fast talking Cal Worthington would show you a bunch of cars and tell you the **story** of why you should haul all the way to Long Beach to visit Worthington Ford and buy your car there.

4. Well, if Cal didn't tell people **his story** they would go to some other car dealership – and the same is true for us.

B. But so often we are afraid to tell our story.

1. We feel so insecure in what we know and believe that we feel inadequate to talk to someone else about God.

2. What if I get it wrong?

- What if they ask me something I don't know about or questions I can't answer?

3. But if you're telling **YOUR** story – about the difference God makes in **your** life – how can you get it wrong? It's your story!

4. Bottom line – to answer the call to bring people closer to God all we have to do is be ourselves and let God use us as we live our lives the best way we can.

C. Let me tell you a story.

1. Once there was a Missionary who was shipwrecked at sea, and washed up at the edge of a remote native village.

2. Half dead from exposure to the elements and the wreck of the vessel, he was taken in by the villagers and nursed back to health.

3. He lived with the villagers the next 20 years – and during that time, he confessed no faith – he preached no sermons – he sang no hymns.

4. He neither read from nor taught any scripture.

5. He made no personal claim of faith at all.

6. But when the Villagers became sick – he attended to them – sometimes long into the night.

7. When the people were hungry – he gave to them from his own food supply.

8. When they were lonely – he was available to talk.

9 He tutored the uneducated – patiently.

10. He always took the side of those who were wronged.

11. There was no human condition among the villagers with which he could not and did not identify.

12. After, 20 years had passed; other missionaries came from the sea to the village and began talking to the people about a man called Jesus.

13. After hearing the stories about Jesus, the Villagers said that he lived among them.

14. One of them said to the missionaries, “Come, we will introduce you to the man you’ve been telling us about.”

15. The missionaries were led to a hut, and there they found their long-lost fellow missionary who they had given up for dead. [Pause]

16. That’s all we have to do, simply live our lives the best way we can – to be Jesus to others.

17. And when we do – when we bring Jesus to others and help them to have a closer relationship with God – we are living out our call from God.

## Conclusion

We have some great things to offer here.

A church whose liturgy and worship speaks to our need for ritual and spirituality.

A church that isn’t going to tell you what to believe, but will struggle along with you to help you figure it out.

A community that will celebrate your joys and support you in your sorrows.

A church that not only talks the talk, but walks the walk as we strive to serve those in need in our community.

A church where you can truly draw closer to God.

Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

And all it takes is an invitation – an invitation from YOU.

We are called to help people draw closer in their relationship to God.

It wasn't easy for Isaiah – it wasn't easy for Peter or Paul – but they relied on God, and we can do that too – and as we do, we too can go out and fish for people.

### Let Us Pray

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. **Amen.**

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