

Hearing God's Call
Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 5:1-11
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In order to fully appreciate the comic I am about to share with you, let me first ask two questions; one how many of you know firsthand what a rotary telephone is? And two, how many of you know firsthand what an iphone is? In this week's New Yorker there was a comic that showed a big, clunky, rotary telephone sitting next to a sleek iphone in a docking station. The rotary telephone speaking to the iphone says, "When I was your age we didn't play video games or take photos or locate things—we just did one thing and we took our sweet time doing it." Making and receiving phone calls has certainly changed over the last forty years! When I was in elementary school we had a class on phone etiquette which included "don't be an eager elephant racing to answer the phone, ask politely to others in the room, "May I answer that?" And don't be a munchy monkey ~ never eat while talking on the telephone." I'm sure technology classes today don't include "eager elephant" or "munchy monkey" comments; rather they include how to stay safe on the internet and how often to change your password.

The making and receiving of phone calls has certainly changed, but hearing God's calling to us as individuals and as communities of faith has had constant content for thousands of years. The heavenly vision in Isaiah 6, the call of the prophet Isaiah, illustrates the content for us in four clear points. 1. There is an appearance of a heavenly being. 2. Some sign of repentance and then forgiveness. 3. Acceptance of being called and 4. The call itself. Let's use Isaiah as a paradigm to look at God's calling of us today.

The first point of course, we question. If someone has seen a heavenly being we think they're on drugs or hallucinating all on their own. Throughout Scripture however, people hearing God's call were often visited by the Divine. Abraham's visit by the three messengers. Jacob wrestling with the angel. Moses and the burning bush. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, Mary being visited by Gabriel and Isaiah in the heavenly vision we read this morning to name just a few. In Scripture we have recorded how God dramatically got people's attention. In modern times, God works most often in less dramatic but not less powerful ways to get our attention to hear God's call. God's call can come in any way, for example, through traumatic events or more often through ordinary people. I can't remember a time I wasn't called to follow God but my call to ordain ministry began thirty years ago and I remember it just like it was yesterday. I was

an undergrad taking a graduate course on the book of Genesis. I was the only female in the class and had just made a presentation. The professor, came up to my desk grabbing each side, looked me in the eye and said, “You are going to seminary aren’t you?” Taken aback, I replied softly, “No” “Why not?” he asked me in front of this all male class. “Because I’m female.” He then got very close, it seemed like two inches from my face and said, “Don’t you dare keep closed a door God is trying to open!” This brings us to the second point on hearing God’s call.

Like Isaiah, we all make excuses when a call comes. Isaiah’s was “Woe is me; I am a man of unclean lips.” Jeremiah’s was “I’m too young.” Mine was “I’m female.” Others include, “I’m too busy. I’m too old. I’m rich. I’m poor; I’m too intelligent for religious nonsense” and a thousand others. But God meets us where we are, knocking on that door of our resistance to journey with us to where God is calling us to go. Our resistance to living in genuine relationship with God, with others and our true selves is the point of purification. The apostle Paul says “we all have sinned and fall short of God’s best for us.” Calvin said, “we repent not in order to gain forgiveness but because we have already been forgiven.” Sin inclines us toward ourselves; purification cleanses us to live in the authentic relationships for which we were created. For Isaiah, a burning coal from the holy altar touched his unclean lips and made him whole. Did it hurt, we are right to think so? When we accept who we are, when we name the places that need acceptance and/or forgiveness, yes, it hurts. It hurts us to admit that we are less than we want to be, but when we do admit it, we can live lives of integrity and wholeness, if not we will spend our lives trying to justify ourselves, to God and others. This brings us to the third and fourth points in hearing God’s call; acceptance of being called and hearing the call itself.

In the heavenly vision of Isaiah 6, at this point, God says, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us.” Isaiah accepts the call with enthusiasm, “Here I am; Send me!” Isaiah becomes one of the Major Prophets to the Israelites. In Luke we heard Jesus’ call to Peter. Like Isaiah, and most of the rest of us, Peter had the initial response, “Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful person.” To which Jesus responds, “do not be afraid, from now on, you will be catching people.” Peter accepts the call and leaves everything to follow Jesus. Peter becomes one of the major disciples on whom Christ built the church: the universal church and our church where God still is calling us...in fact, re-calling us!

With that word, recall, I can’t help but think of Toyota’s troubles: accelerators that get stuck and brakes that don’t work! I think of the well meaning individuals and groups traveling to help in Haiti but for whatever reasons were

unprepared for the situation there and they ended up taking the assistance much needed *for* the Haitians, *from* the Haitians. Their good intentions were like a stuck accelerator moving full speed ahead that ended up crashing into unknown walls. I think of the many ways our consumer societies of the last decade or so had the brakes fail and now we are recovering from that runaway ride. All those that I have named in this sermon, got called again and again...their calls changing as they grew in their relationship with God and in the callings they had.

And it's the same for our church, like I said like week, 2010 will be a year of discernment: a year to put on the wide angle lens and to look at things: who we are, who we are called to be and how we are called to serve. 2010 is a year to hear again, anew God's re-calling of us as Covenant Church. Perhaps we will have to look at the ways we are accelerating. Perhaps we will have to apply the brakes in some areas. Perhaps when we examine ourselves we will see areas that need repentance and forgiveness and healing that we may be whole so that we can hear again God's call accepting it for who we are now, and saying "yes" to it, so that we may be an embodiment of God's "yes" to others in our church, community and world.

God's re-call is for all of us. Perhaps you see yourself as a rotary telephone...outdated and out of service...not the case...your wisdom, strength, insights and living history are invaluable to the community God is calling into being. Perhaps you see yourself as an iphone, we need you to teach us to play games to build up our community, and to take pictures to record what God is doing and to help us locate places and people in Madison and around the world that God's call is taking us to. Perhaps you are an "eager elephant," we need your enthusiasm...shared politely with grace. And like it or not, we're all "munchy monkeys"...for we are all called to come and eat, to feast at this table. Christ's table: the table of forgiveness. The table of acceptance. This earthy table with a heavenly vision that we are called and recalled as the beloved children of God and from this table, we hear God's call echoing from the vision in Isaiah..."whom shall I send and who will go for us." In faith and in trust, we call back: "Here We Are! Send Us!" Amen!