

Isaiah 6:1-8 Luke 5:1-11 Surely you can't mean me!!

The year was about 742 BC. World politics were in flux. The Assyrians were about to take over the land of Judah. Isaiah was called to deliver a particular message, one of judgment to the people of Israel.

Isaiah had a vision while in the temple in Jerusalem. In it, he experienced an overwhelming awareness of the utter holiness of God - a consciousness that God was beyond all imagining.

This experience highlighted to Isaiah his own unworthiness and that of the society around him. He cried out in anguish and utter despair. "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips ..." Then Isaiah underwent a ritual of purification. A heavenly being flew toward him with a burning coal taken from the altar of heaven. The hot coal was placed against his lips and Isaiah heard God ask "Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?" Isaiah responded, as we know, with "Here I am. Send me!"

Luke tells the story of the calling of the four fishermen. Large crowds have been following Jesus from place to place. Jesus borrows Peter's boat to speak to the crowd more effectively, and when his teaching was finished, he suggests that they do some fishing. Peter explains that they've already been out and caught nothing. However, because it's Jesus, who asks him, Peter does what is requested, even though he knows better. The results completely astound Peter and he falls down in awe in front of Jesus. It was an epiphany moment. In his confession of unworthiness, he shows that he hasn't seen Jesus as anything more than a charismatic, travelling rabbi. Now he sees him as the long-awaited Christ. James and John and the others in the boat are also amazed and overwhelmed.

Both of these stories contain an epiphany moment - a moment when God is seen, becomes real, in an irresistibly powerful way, to people who consider themselves ordinary and therefore unworthy. In each story the experience changed that person forever. A new vision and a new life suddenly opened up in front of them. They realized that they have been called by God to be an epiphany so that other "ordinary" people like themselves might also discover the amazing power and grace of God.

Feeling unworthy - we've all been there, haven't we? Being overwhelmed with the impossibilities of a situation - we've been there too, haven't we? Maybe we're there, now.

Both of our passages speak of trust - radical, "holding nothing back", trust. They speak of following the call of God even when it might prove unpopular, unproductive and dangerous. Isaiah was called to deliver a message of doom and condemnation. It may have felt like he was being set up to be very unpopular. Peter had already fished all night, and come up dry. How foolish would he look if he "simply" lowered his nets on the other side of the boat? [Although, from this past summer of piloting the boat, I've come to realize that the fish are always "just over there."]

What about us? Can we trust God to provide what is best for us? Have we any idea of the power we unleash in our lives when we are able to trust God?

"Where are you in these stories?" "Who are you in these stories?" Can we trust, with a trust that accepts and lives with the ambiguities and the uncertainties of life? Can we trust even when we feel inadequate, unworthy, insufficient, lacking?

There are a couple of stories that illustrate part of the message in these passages -



The opening night of the concert was a tremendous success. The fans left excited and in awe of the great performance. Night two the audience had an electricity about it which was contagious to all backstage. Night two, was a repeat of last night possible? The director's announcement hit everyone like a sudden blow in the abdomen. The star cannot perform tonight! All eyes turned to the understudy who gasped, "Oh, no, not me! I can't go on. How can I ever perform after such an outstanding performance last night? I am not capable; I am not ready!" The director ignored the understudy; the audience was told of the change. At first there was a stunned silence, then a few whispers, and suddenly applause broke out along with a chant for the understudy who stepped on stage before the packed house and gave the performance of a lifetime! - Lynch

The teacup was a lovely, fragile thing of bone china, pure milk white in the thickest parts and transparent lavender-white in the thinnest areas of design. When it was held up to the light, these differences drew a pattern that was lovely and delicate. It was an antique, part of a collection that was used monthly, when it was Heather's turn to host the bridge club.

After one bridge club, as Heather's husband was carrying the cups to the kitchen, the translucent white bone china cup smashed to the floor. He was horrified, and quickly picked up the pieces and looked them over. He decided that it could be epoxied so that the damage would not be apparent, and his efforts succeeded! However, he determined that the cup could not be put back into service, because the tea or coffee would stain the edges of the breaks. So, he bought a small display shelf with a drawer large enough to hold the playing cards, pencils and score pads for the bridge club, and placed the cup on the shelf for all to see. When the other members arrived the next time, several people commented on how sad they felt that the cup could no longer be used, but Bob corrected them, saying, "It's not useless, even though it's not perfect. I just won't use it the same way I did before. From now on, it will be everyone's cup to admire." -- Herrmann

As God continues to create and seek those who don't know him or his grace and love, God does, in fact, mean me – and you. We are the chosen, the called, the ones in whom God has entrusted the Good News. Even with all our feelings of unworthiness, weariness, uncertainty, discouragement ... we are to be as Christ in and for the world God loves and longs to save.

Remember the response of the Biblical Biggies when God called them. Isaiah: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips ..." And Peter: "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" And Paul: "For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle ... But by the grace of God, I am what I am."

A number of years ago, I journeyed through a time of tremendous feelings of unworthiness. I actually talked with a colleague about leaving the ministry. His response was blunt. He said, "If you are going to use your own misguided guilt as an excuse to cop out on what God needs you to do with the life He gave you, then you're not the person I thought you were." Then he went on to remind me that the guilt was self-imposed - that God's grace and love had already washed me and given me the worthiness to stand tall. "All" I had to do was trust that love and grace.