

PILGRIM

CHURCH

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

COMMITMENT

Isaiah 6:1-8 Luke 5: 1 – 11

Pilgrim Bud Precise

“Calling All the Children Home” is the name of a song by John McCutcheon. It reminds me of my mother calling to us children on a summer evening. Playing across the street in a field we would hear her calling and know it was time to stop playing for the day and go to supper. McCutcheon’s song is about calling children in to supper.

Johnny, Mary Claire, Lulu, Jeannie,
Kevin, Jack, Patty, Nancy Lou.
Shadows growing long, night’s growing dim,
supper’s on the table, everybody come in,
been playing at the river, I’m tired to the bone,
she’s calling all the children home.

We know about calling someone on the phone. Our search committee is in the midst of “Calling” a full-time pastor for Pilgrim. The Bible contains stories of the call of God to people we remember well. God called to Moses from the burning bush. God called to Paul on the Damascus road. Our lectionary readings for today in Isaiah and Luke are about the call of God.

“Call” is generally associated with the vocation of Ministry. But I want to get by that concept right here at the start of this sermon. Why should call be limited to one profession of life? I believe that it is possible for any person to resolve what to with their life - their chosen work – that they are answering God’s call. CALL IS REALLY A SENSE OF VOCATION BROUGHT TO FOCUS IN A DECISION. Ministers hear the call to be ministers. I believe teachers hear the call to be teachers. Artists are called to be musicians, painters. Call need not be a dramatic or sudden. But it may be, and I think generally is, the culmination of a growing awareness of what one may and ought to do with their life. God gives us gifts, capacities and we are called to use them well.

Isaiah is in the temple. He is probably attending the funeral of King Uzziah. He has this vision that literally changes his life forever. Our story begins with a theophany, an appearance of God. The whole temple becomes the very court of God. God is high and lifted up – the hem of God’s robe fills the temple. Seraphs are attending God. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.” Isaiah is engulfed in this song praising God. It is a moment of CALL for Isaiah. He realizes he is not worthy of this presence of God. It is not God who says he is unworthy. There is this live coal from the altar that a seraph uses to touch his lips, to take away his guilt. Isaiah hears the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah answers, “Here I am, send me.” God’s words must be spoken to a people, a stiff necked people who have broken the covenant. It will not be an easy task. But Isaiah has heard this call of God on his life, and he is determined to answer this call with the commitment of his life. It is a moment of consecration for Isaiah. To consecrate is not to put something or someone in a safe world of what is holy. To Consecrate means to – “derail from normalcy. They whole action inside that temple for Isaiah is decisive and life changing. What an amazing story of the call of God to Isaiah. It happens in the temple where people come to hear the voice of God. I dare say that Isaiah did not expect what he experienced in the temple on that day. It changed his life forever.

Our Luke reading for today is about God's call to the first disciples. Jesus is teaching and there are so many people he gets into a boat to teach. He borrowed one of the boats belonging to Simon, the fisherman. He finishes his teaching and says to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon looks at his men who have worked all night. They have probably finished cleaning the nets. It has not been a good fishing trip. Simon answers Jesus, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing." You can just hear the weary tone in his words. He is not excited about this. But he answers, "Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets" They catch so many fish they have to call to the other boats near by to come help haul the catch. Amid the excitement of the great catch, Simon realizes there is something more important going on. He echoes the sentiment of Isaiah with the words, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Jesus simply says the words that God so often says to us, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Don't get hung up by the choice of words here "Catch people." They are not catching people as though they are food to be consumed – like dead fish. They will be saving men and women to the living the life of the good news in all its fullness.

I look at this call. Peter, James and John are not in the temple. They are not in a place looking for the voice of God to speak to them. They are at their familiar place of work – the seashore. They have worked all night. They are tired. Jesus does not wait for the best time to reach out to them. They are scared, yet amazed. They left their boats and nets. They left the old way and followed.

God does not always show up to us after a good night's sleep. God's call is not always at the teachable moment. Sometimes, after we have given everything we can give, we hear the call of God to us to do more. Sometimes it takes the power of an earthquake in a place like Haiti for us to reach into the goodness that God has given to us. Hearing the living word of God is not enough. Acting upon the call leads us to commitment. Discipleship often leads us down roads that we had not intended to travel. Such is the nature of the call of God to us.

She was a member of our congregation. She and her husband had two children. I needed someone to cook breakfast for a group of high school students. The Supreme Court had removed prayer from a formal setting at school and we had parents mad. I suggested that it was not really the school's job to teach our young people about prayer and that maybe we should offer something at church before the school day began. I volunteered to lead the session. "Okay, but we have to serve breakfast." I asked Gloria to help with that project. That began a series of tasks for her in the life of the church. She became chairperson of a circle for the United Methodist women, a member of the administrative board, chairperson of the board, conference committees and was elected Conference Lay Leader. She was talking with a group one day and I went by. She pointed to me and said, "He is the one who got me into all of this. He asked me to cook breakfast at our church." I don't believe that. It was not my call. It wasn't even the call of the church. I believe it was the call of God to her life.

Like a mother calling children in to supper, God calls our names and sets us to the tasks in our own day.