

rePOSE - CONFOUNDED TO COMMITTED  
A SERMON BASED ON ISAIAH 6:1-8  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2019  
10:00 a.m.

In today's passage,

God has a message he wants brought to his people.

And God calls.

Whom shall I send?

And who will go for us?

Isaiah is the one who hears the call.

Isaiah answers.

'Here am I. Send me.'

Recent seminary graduates and many clergy love this passage.

There is a hymn in the Presbyterian hymnbook entitled

'Here I Am, Lord.'

The refrain is,

Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if you lead me.

It gets sung all the time at seminary, the school for clergy.

It tends to get sung a little swoopily

and with deep feeling,

and a little verklemptishness,

as people imagine themselves,

heading off to serve the Lord

wherever and however he might call,

as long as it's a full time position,

in a healthy church,

preferably in southern Ontario,

with full pension, and benefits.

The hymn always gets picked at ordinations and inductions,

as people imagine themselves

readily answering God's call,

in the fashion after Isaiah.

If you haven't guessed by now,

singing that hymn swoopily doesn't do much for me.

Neither does an overly easy association or parallel  
with Isaiah.

In these occasions, it tends to strike me that  
the singing of 'Here am I, send me.'  
carries about as much weight as  
offering to make a run to the store,  
for the forgotten items  
for the dinner party that evening.

Sure, Here I am. Send me.

I'll make a run to the store. No problem.

All you have to do is read around

Isaiah's answer to God's call,  
to realize that what he has offered  
is no run to the store,  
or something to take off of a to do list.

Isaiah has had a vision of the Lord,  
an encounter.

He has been before God in worship.  
And what he saw, was God high and exalted,  
seated on a throne,  
and the train of his robe filled the temple.

There were seraphim.

Some artists have depicted seraphim as six winged angels.

Who is to say precisely what they look like,

but these majestic, otherworldly creatures  
were crying out,

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

It was a sound that shook the temple,  
like an earthquake, or a freight train going by.

Even these majestic creatures had to cover their eyes

before the brightness of the glory of the Lord.

In humility, they also covered their feet.

Isaiah’s response in this encounter with God

in this experience of God’s presence,

his response in the moment was not a

Wow, 'That is really nice.' or 'What a great space.'

or 'I feel like they are doing a good job here.'

or 'I could see myself volunteering here.'

His response was 'Woe is me, I am ruined.'

Some translations will say, I am undone.

Which is another way of translating something along the lines of,

'I'm going to come apart. I'm going to die.'

Anne Lamott reminds us that as Christians,

coming to church, coming to worship,

coming before God, we need to be careful and mindful

of where exactly we are, who we are before

and the posture we take.

She says in her book, 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek'

"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs,

sufficiently sensible of conditions.

Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power

we so blithely invoke?

Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?

The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets,  
mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.

It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church;

we should all be wearing crash helmets.

Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares;

they should lash us to our pews.

For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offence,

or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."

"Sure I can help you out God, Here am I. Send me.

Just let me check my calendar.

How's Thursday look?

Oh wait, Thursday I have a lunch. Friday?"

That is not the kind of response or posture

of someone who has seen God in all his glory.

We need to be careful to truly see who it is we worship,

and who it is we serve.

Because seeing God for who God is,  
will undo us.

It will unravel what and who we think we are.

It is in Romans where Paul writes to those of us who are the church,

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

But think of yourself with sober judgement.

Sober judgement,

serious, sensible, carefully considered judgement.

For instance,

I thought I was tall.

Then I found myself standing in a group

at a conference in Michigan.

Michigan is the land of the descendants of Dutch giants.

I was not even close to being the tall one in that group.

I thought I was young.

But my kids are in their twenties now.

I remember how ancient my parents were when I was their age.

I thought I was kind.

Then I hung out with some who are truly, deeply kind.

And I realized, it never even crossed my mind to reach out  
in that particular way.

I thought I was organized.

But after locking myself out of my house and work  
multiple times,

I realized I don't really have a good system for my keys.

I thought I was good, or at least, pretty good.

willing to speak for God and all that,

But then I stood with the prophet Isaiah before God  
in God's throne room found in Isaiah 6.

And I was undone and a little wrecked, ruined.

We need to be careful.

Isaiah thought he was a prophet,

thought he knew what he was talking about,

thought he knew who he was talking about.

But when he saw God.



And saw God in his holiness

All he could say was,

“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.”

I thought I was tall, young, kind and good,

but with just a quick look around, it doesn't take much to undo

all that I think I am.

Never mind what happens to me when I look at God

and God himself becomes the standard of comparison.

A look at myself, in God's presence and

and my perspective of myself changes

is re-posed, repositioned to woe is me, I am ruined.

How could I possibly be so bold

as to think God could use me?

Would even want to use me?

Without exception,  
the first reaction of those being called by God in Scripture  
is to turn away from the job,  
and in some cases, even to turn the job down.

God called to Moses at the burning bush

"Moses, I want you!"

"I'm here, Lord. What do you want me for?"

"I want you to stand up to

the greatest political and military force

in the world,

and to tell him in no uncertain terms, 'Let my people go!'

How did Moses respond?

He didn't say, "Oh, thank you Lord. Glad you've seen my potential.

How's Thursday look?

He didn't sing swoopily.

I will go Lord, where you lead me.

That's not how it went.

More like, "Are you kidding? You've got the wrong man.  
You're asking me to do precisely the thing I'm not gifted in.  
In fact, I've got a speech impediment  
that prevents me from speaking clearly . . .

I don't want it God.

Send someone else."

God called Gideon, "Gideon, I want you."

And Gideon said,

But, I'm from the weakest clan in Manasseh,

and I am the youngest in my father's house".

God called Deborah, "Deborah, I want you."

And Deborah says, "But I'm a woman . . .

how can I lead a four-star general into battle?"

God called Amos, "Amos, I want you."

And Amos says, "But I'm just a sheep rancher.

What do I know about solemn assemblies?"

God called David, "I want you."

And David says, "But I'm such an

unlikely candidate that my father Jesse didn't even bring me in from  
the fields to be examined by Samuel" .

However, who you think you are,

and what you think you can do and be and offer,

is not the criteria for God's call.

It never has been.

It is unnerving to see who you thought you were come apart.

It can be unnerving to lose yourself on the exposing journey from

who you think you are, to be reshaped and reposed

and to repose, rest,

into who you discover yourself to be before God.

A look at God

and a call from God can indeed prompt some self doubt.

So while seeing God in all his splendour,

while understanding just how big, and majestic,

and awesome, and powerful and mighty God actually is  
may leave you undone,  
nevertheless, this Lord, our Creator  
this Ruler reigns, and has final authority over us  
and it the God who creates from nothing  
and who brings order from our chaos.

For at the time Isaiah says

I am undone.

I am a man of unclean lips.

I live among a people of unclean lips.

As Isaiah is unravelling,

the seraphim took tongs and lifted a burning coal from the altar,  
flew to Isaiah with the live coal,  
and touched it to his lips,  
to his unclean lips.

This isn't punishment. It is preparation.

Now if you a little bit about refining metal,  
you know that fire can purify,

heat burns out impurities and separates metals.

The Bible speaks not only of being washed by God,

it also uses the metaphor of a refiner's fire.

And so a coal is brought against Isaiah's unclean lips.

Burning him clean, purifying him, refining him.

Preparing him.

The seraphim said to him,

'See, this has touched your lips;

your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'

The person you were revealed to be before God,

the fear you had before God,

can be burned away with your sin, with your guilt.

Isaiah became a different person when refined by God.

From casual arrogance about being before God,

to pure terror at seeing himself in God's presence,

to being refined and purified

by the gracious, purifying fire of God,

Isaiah was a new man, a new person.

He was re-posed and could repose, be at rest.

He was in a position so that when God's question came,

“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”

Isaiah knew, that now,

touched by God,

purified by God,

healed and atoned for by God,

touched by God's work in his life

he was actually able and prepared to go for God.

No longer a casual offer to help out,

or a mindless offer to volunteer,

Isaiah knew he had the refining grace of God to offer.

Here am I, send me.

Isaiah was called to bring a confusing message to God's people.

Go and tell this people:

‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding;

be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’”

Make the heart of this people calloused;

make their ears dull

and close their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts,

and turn and be healed.’

Then Isaiah asked, ‘For how long, Lord?’

And God answered:

‘Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant,

until the houses are left deserted

and the fields ruined and ravaged,

until the Lord has sent everyone far away

and the land is utterly forsaken.



And though a tenth remains in the land,  
it will again be laid waste.

But as the terebinth and oak

leave stumps when they are cut down,  
so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.'

It is a message that all four gospel writers quote,  
and a message which concludes the book of Acts.

It is a message that tells us that it can be really difficult  
for God to get through to a hard heart and closed mind.

Every time it is quoted in the gospels

and in Acts,

it is quoted to show that some will refuse to get it.

Jesus says it

“They will be ever seeing, never perceiving.”

after he tells stories about the kingdom of God.

Jesus says it for the people who don't like what he's saying.

“They are ever hearing, never understanding.”

Paul preached the kingdom of God,  
and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ,  
boldly and without hindrance.  
He paid dearly.  
Floggings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, persecution.

The call of God  
the positioning by God is anything but casual.

God's call to Isaiah wasn't a trip to the store.  
Or volunteering on a Saturday morning,  
Here I am, send me, was a complete surrender.  
It was a difficult call,  
Take a message that likely won't get through to people.  
For how long O Lord?  
Was answered with,  
as long as it takes.

Fred Craddock talks about how  
when he said to God, 'Here I am, send me.'  
He thought he might get away with

one big sacrifice, one big blowout of obedience.

Craddock says, I was sincere then,

as I have been these forty-five years since.

“I give my life,”

Here I am.

But nobody warned me

that I could not write one big cheque.

I've had to write forty-five years of little cheques: 87 cents, 21 cents, a dollar and three cents.

Just nibbled away at this giving of life.”

Years of little cheques.

Thousands of little steps.

Here I am. Send me.

I will go Lord.

How long O Lord?

God asks, “Who will I send. Who will go for us?”

It can be you. You can answer, Here am I, send me.

It is thousands of little steps.

Thousands of little steps that you are able to take,  
and keep taking,  
because  
having seen God in his throne room,  
having come undone  
only to be refined and restored  
and reposed  
by the fire of God's love.

You know, you are here, because of God's touch,  
you have been reposed and can repose, rest.  
Because of God's touch,  
you can be sent, you can go,  
representing God  
called by God,  
taking steps that could number in the thousands,  
to bring his message.

Much later in his ministry,  
when he was questioned about what God was doing,

and what God had called him to

Isaiah said this,

“Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,

the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,

and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary

and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,

and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the Lord

will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary,

they will walk and not be faint.”

Thousands of steps.

Don't be frightened to stand before God.

You will no doubt be undone.

Untangled from arrogance, stubbornness and hard heartedness.

But you will be reposed, reshaped and at rest

when the everlasting God refines you and renews you

Don't be frightened to have the coal touched to your lips.

Refined, purified, redeemed by the work of your gracious God,

You can then answer God's call with his strength, not your own

You can say to God, with all seriousness,

and all conviction,

"Here am I.

I will go for you.

Send me."

Amen.

