

Isaiah 6:1-13 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Luke 5:1-11  
7 February 2010

### “What’s Your Story?”

What’s your story? What’s your story with God? How do you approach God? Or perhaps do you just shrink away from the very thought? What do you hear God saying to you? Anything? Is it encouraging, scolding, loving, prodding, egging on, maybe even pleading? What’s your mission from God? Do you have one? Do you hear from God a purpose for your life? In short, what’s your story?

I want you to think about these questions this morning. And to help you think about them, I’m going to tell the stories of some people that perhaps you have heard of. Their names are Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul. Obviously I’ll have to lay out the short versions of their stories, but I’m thinking that as we hear those stories, it’ll help us sort out what our stories are, might be, could be. So here goes.

Let’s start with Isaiah. We heard his call to mission read this morning. Each week at the end of worship we hear, “Go in peace, serve the Lord,” or some variant of that. And because the bulletin tells us to do it, we say, “thanks be to God,” when maybe what we should say, “Who, me? You want *me* to do *what*? You *sure* about that?”

if we actually said that, and maybe that’s what we ought to put in the bulletin—what do you think?—if we actually said that, we would be right in line with Isaiah. Isaiah’s call story is set in the place where heaven and earth meet, the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. It is a place of awe, where the scale of alone dwarfs the prophet. God’s hem alone fills this building. God is attended by fierce creatures with ear-piercing voices. The place is filled with smoke. No wonder Isaiah is cowering in the corner, hoping not to be noticed. Is this your story? Is this how you approach God? Not many do any more. But if you’re one of them, Isaiah is your man.

Isaiah was hoping to not get noticed. But he did get noticed. One of the fierce creatures comes over to him and touches his lips with a hot coal, which doesn’t seem to hurt, and Isaiah is pronounced ritually clean, ready to stand before God’s throne. Note this, especially if you approach—or avoid—God as did Isaiah. God does not wait for us to get clean or pure or worthy before God appears. God calls sinners to do holy things. In a world where we are constantly being told that we are insufficient, God’s trust in us seems imprudent. But that’s the way God is—with Isaiah and, as we shall see, with Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, and Paul.

Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, and Paul all had some serious shortcomings. When God appeared to Moses, Moses was just minding his own business. When he saw this burning bush, he was curious about it. But when he found out that God wanted to send him out on what seemed to him a foolish suicide mission to pharaoh, he came up with one argument after another as to why he was not the right guy. And to every argument Moses raised, God responded, “Yeah, you’re right. I’ll fix that,” or “I’ll take care of that.” Is this your story? Is this how you approach God? Do you constantly argue with God and try to wiggle out of what God is trying to rope you into? Then

Moses is your guy.

Or maybe your story is more like Jeremiah's, who when called said simply, "I'm just a kid. Nobody is going to listen to me." And he was right. But that didn't matter.

Or maybe your story is like Paul's, who because of his past life of persecution of the followers of Christ never got over his unworthiness. So in today's reading, completely out of the blue, Paul writes, "Last of all, as to one untimely born, Jesus appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Which kind of begs the question, if Paul is the least of the apostles—those who are sent to remind the world of the God's good news in Christ—what about us? In what ways are we who are least, the most effective and most important agents of God's good news? If this is your story, then you are like Martin Luther who wrote, "What I accept, I accept not on my own merits or by any right that I may personally have to it. I know that I am receiving more than a worthless one like me deserves; indeed, I have deserved the very opposite. But I claim what I claim by the right of a bequest and of another's goodness."

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, each in their own way responded to "Go in peace, serve the Lord," with, "Not me!" The one exception I can think of in all the Bible is Mary, who when the angel said to her that she in her unmarried would bear a son who would save his people from their sins, said, "Behold, the servant of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word." That response makes her truly exceptional. Is that your story? Is that how you respond to God? Then Mary is your girl.

Peter was not Mary. Peter was like Isaiah. When the holiness of Jesus is revealed to him, Peter responds, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

What's your story? How do you approach or avoid God? What do you hear God saying to you? How do you respond to it? What's your mission from God? Do you hear from God a purpose for your life? What's your story?

Our individual answers will differ. But as we are sent from here this morning each of us is called, invited to, "Go in peace, serve the Lord." We may cower, we may argue, we may deem ourselves unqualified or unworthy. Doesn't matter. Jesus came to us to reveal God and redeem the world. But Jesus is known to us only through the witness of his apostles, his sent ones, those who despite their cowering, their arguments, or their unworthiness stepped up and stepped out of their comfort zones to speak the Word. Without them, we'd be in the dark. Jesus is known to us only through the witness of his apostles, his sent ones. And we, people like you and me, are the only apostles around today. And so we are sent, invited, cajoled, pleaded with, and egged on by an imprudent and foolish God to go in peace and serve the Lord.