

“Are you a waddling worshipper?” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
February 10, 2019, Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Isaiah 6:1-8

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

The great philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, told a story about ducks that came from an imaginary town in a country where only ducks live. One Sunday morning, all the ducks in town headed to church, some with their children waddling behind them. They entered the doors and sat in their duck pews, sang songs from their duck hymnals, and gave to underprivileged ducks at the offering time. When it came time for the sermon, the duck preacher spoke eloquently of how God had given the ducks wings with which to fly. With these wings there was nowhere the ducks could not go, there was no God-given task the ducks could not accomplish. With those wings they could soar into the presence of God himself. Shouts of "Amen" were quacked throughout the duck congregation. With that the pastor closed his duck Bible and dismissed his congregation of ducks. The ducks left, commenting on what a wonderful message they had heard -- and waddled back home.

Too often, people at a worship service waddle away from worship as they waddled in -- unchallenged and unchanged. Perhaps it is because we are creatures of habit. Week after week, congregants sit in the same place in the same pew, following an order of service that they know by heart, listening to a sermon which they assume is intended primarily for someone else.

Perhaps Isaiah waddled into the Temple on the day described in the text. Perhaps Isaiah expected to sing a few Psalms and say a few prayers. Perhaps he didn't expect anything different to happen while he was in the Temple worshipping God. He may have waddled in, but he certainly didn't waddle out.

When Isaiah encountered God in the Temple, some scholars believe that Isaiah may have been participating in the annual enthronement celebration, a celebration of God who sits on a heavenly throne, ruling Israel and the whole world. Psalm 93 is one of the Psalms that was probably used in this celebration.

Let me read the first two verses from Psalm 93:

**The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength.
He has established the world; it shall never be moved;
your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.**

You can see from these two verses that the Hebrew people viewed God as a king who sat on a heavenly throne. Indeed that is what our reading from Isaiah says. Isaiah said, **I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.**

God as king? Is this your image of God? Many people think of God as a friend or as a calming presence or a healing helper. Some people think that God agrees with their political and cultural thinking. God is on their side. Other's believe that God wants to see them prosper. There may be some truth to some of these characterizations, but these images of God are far from the powerful, humbling image of God Isaiah experienced.

Isaiah saw a God who is high, holy, lofty, sitting on a throne far above our political parties. The God Isaiah describes cannot be forced to get in line with our personal or national interest. Isaiah

experienced a powerful and mighty God. Isaiah was afraid that he might die because he saw God. He had read God's words to Moses: "no one shall see me and live." (Exodus 33:20)

Isaiah's experience was both visual and physical. The entire building shook when the Seraphim sang: **'holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the who earth is full of his glory.'** Seraphim are mentioned only once in the Bible, in these verses. Seraphim aren't those cute naked, chubby little winged, cupid-like creatures floating at the corner of Baroque paintings. Seraphim are frightening. Seraph roughly translates as 'fiery.' In this scripture they sing with such thunderous voices that the hinges on the doors of the Temple shake.

How would you react if that happened here in our church today? Might you react the same as Isaiah? **"Woe is me! I am lost."**

It's not too often that any of us feel the power and awesome presence of God. Perhaps you have when you've been in nature walking in the woods or perhaps you've been in a storm where you were totally helpless and experienced the power of nature, such as a wind storm or rain storm. Most of us have a difficult time relating to Isaiah's experience. If you have had such an experience, I'd be interested in your story. My encounters with God have mostly been comforting encounters.

But I stray from my point. Isaiah was forgiven by God so Isaiah could carry God's message to the people. The seraph touched Isaiah's lips with a hot coal and God said, **"Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."** Realizing that he wasn't going to die and that God had had mercy on him, Isaiah was able to move forward in his relationship with God. He was able to say yes to God's request.

Obviously, Isaiah had options. He could have questioned God to find out what God had in mind. Like Jonah, he could have told God he wasn't going to Nineveh. He might have suggested to God that he'd be happy to go to Samaria or Egypt if he needed to leave the country. He could have said, like I hear so often, I'm booked solid and have no more time. Send someone else.

But Isaiah said none of those things. He admitted his sinfulness, God forgave him and then he answered God's call. God commissioned him to go.

There are many people who are involved in mission trips. I have been to El Salvador twice. Perhaps some of you have helped in Mexico or another country where the people need assistance. But God did not ask Isaiah to leave his homeland to go to a foreign. God asked Isaiah to go to Isaiah's people – the Hebrew people.

God isn't necessarily asking you and me to go to a foreign land. What God is asking you and me to do is to go to our people. Who will go to the care facility and just talk with the people there who don't have visitors? Who will sign up with Big Brothers/Big Sisters to help a kid who needs a caring adult role model in his or her life? Who will read to preschoolers or tutor a junior high student? Who will teach in our Sunday School?

So the question is put to us: **"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"** Please respond, "Here am I, send me" after each of my questions. The questions are really questions from God put to us.

Who will I send to the struggling single parent who often feels overwhelmed with responsibility?
Here am I, send me.

Who will I send to the shut-in who has no transportation to visit the doctor?

Here am I, send me.

Who will I send to teach our children my ways?

Here am I, send me.
Who will I send to the sick and the infirm?
Here am I, send me.
Who will I send to my next-door neighbor?
Here am I, send me.
Who will I send to the school board meeting to speak up for better education for our children?
Here am I, send me.
Who will I send to City Hall to protest the treatment of the poor and disadvantaged?
Here am I, send me.

Who will I send?
Here am I, send me.

Go, then, to our people.

Doing these things, answering God's call on our life, requires a sense of humility and lots of love. Remember last week? We read Paul's comments about love in First Corinthians 13. It's not about moving mountains or speaking in tongues. It's about love.

Here are some examples of people going to people:

Michel Roux, President and founder of Crillon Importers, Ltd., Paramus, New Jersey: I've always operated on the principle that your first real dollar isn't the first dollar that you earn. Your first real dollar is the one that you give away. Since I've had the good fortune to become successful in America, I want to depart with no more than the \$200 that I had in my pocket when I arrived here. ... The world is your larger family. You have a responsibility to provide for its future as well [as for your family].

Preacher and author, Tony Campolo, tell this story: Although Nancy has a handicapping condition and is confined to a wheelchair, she has an extraordinary ministry. Every week, in the personals section of her local newspaper, she runs an ad that reads, "If you are lonely or have a problem, call me. I am in a wheelchair and I seldom get out. We can share our problems with each other. I'd love to talk." She spends much of her day on the telephone talking with the more than 30 lonely and discouraged people who call each week. When Campolo asked how she came to be confined to a wheelchair, Nancy revealed that she had tried to commit suicide by jumping from the balcony of her apartment. Instead of dying, however, she ended up in a hospital room paralyzed from the waist down. One night in the hospital, she said, Jesus came to her and very clearly said, "You have had a healthy body and a crippled soul. From this day on you will have a crippled body, but you will have a healthy soul." She said, "I gave my life to Jesus that night in that hospital room, and I knew that if I kept a healthy soul, it would mean that I would have to help other people. And so I do."

Our goal should always be to get ourselves in line with God and what God wants us to go and do.

The voice of the Lord called to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah said, "Here am I; send me!" (v. 8). Isaiah knew that forgiveness freed him to go in a new direction, not to return to his former ways. He believed that new life was being given to him so that he could serve the Lord, and so he offered to go in whatever direction God would send him. He became one of the greatest of the prophets, speaking God's word to a troubled, corrupt and sinful society.

What do you think God has forgiven you to do?

The world still needs prophets, courageous souls willing to deliver the message "Thus says the Lord" to a society that is quick to block out divine words. But the world also needs teachers and counselors, preachers and evangelists, healers and helpers, as well as people of vision and energy and integrity in

every line of work that is being performed today. So be a volunteer with compassion. A clerk with Christian vision. An accountant with a sense of discipleship.

When you have a vision of God, you cannot not do something. Painters with a vision paint. Composers compose. Writers write. Christians “go and tell,” and show and tell.

That’s what Christ-followers have been forgiven to do. What is God calling you to do? I know it’s not to waddle into church each Sunday, listen to a sermon meant for someone else and then waddle back home.

What is God calling you to do?

The ushers are passing out a basket of black stones which represent the live coal the Seraph took with a pair of tongs to touch Isaiah’s lips. Slip this black stone in your pocket or purse and use it to remind you each day that you are forgiven. And in that forgiveness ask yourself, ‘what is God calling me to do today?’

May God bless your every effort.