

Mother Lynn Finnegan  
Church of the Holy Faith  
Fifth Sunday After The Epiphany  
Isaiah 6:1-8; Ps 138;  
1 Cor 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11  
February 9, 2025

### Calls and Fiery Flying Snakes

We - are still in the season of Epiphany. Because Easter is relatively late this year – on April 20<sup>th</sup>, we will actually continue to celebrate this Epiphany season for three more Sundays after today. This gives us the glorious opportunity to celebrate numerous manifestations, or “epiphanies” of Jesus’ divinity and God’s relationship to humanity. In today’s lectionary, we hear three “call” stories: stories of how the prophet Isaiah, the apostle Paul, and the apostle Peter responded to a call from God. What manifestations, what epiphanies, can we glean from these stories? One commentator looked at the richness of these texts and identified several themes: trust, call, discipleship, abundance, discouragement, risk, and persistence. Today, I am going to focus on two revelations I see in these lessons: first, that God desires a relationship with us, the humans he lovingly formed in his own image; and second, if we desire to fully, fully, accept the invitation to that relationship, if we want the courage to answer God’s call in our life, if we want the joy of God’s grace flowing through us, we must first humbly come to God seeking forgiveness.

God desires relationship; he wants us to participate in his mission of love and reconciliation. “God is faithful;” wrote the apostle Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, “by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>1</sup> The word for “fellowship” used by Paul literally means “business partnership” in Greek. It is impossible to comprehend the magnitude of love that motivates God, God, to partner with us, but here it is: we see it in our

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 1:4-9

biblical history and in our own lives over and over again. God *longs* for us to partner with him. As theologian C.S. Lewis observed, “He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye.”<sup>2</sup> In each scripture passage, we hear God calling: he calls Isaiah to do the hard work of prophetic truth-telling; he calls Paul to proclaim the gospel and let go of false righteousness and exclusion, and he calls Peter, inviting him to abandon his livelihood and follow Jesus.

In Isaiah, the prophet envisions himself before the majestic presence of God. Flying six-winged seraphs – a word meaning fiery and serpentine – are all about the smoke-filled temple, calling words of praise so loud the place shakes. If that were not strange enough, one of the seraphs touches a burning coal to Isaiah’s mouth. “Then,” the prophet recounts, “I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” The prophet replies, “Here am I; send me!” Let me just say this right now: if I were to see God surrounded by intensely loud, fiery, six-winged flying snakes in a smoke-filled room, with one of them putting a hot coal in my mouth, there is a high probability my response will be to run away screaming. Yet Isaiah does no such thing. In an act of life-transforming humility, Isaiah admits he is a man of “unclean lips.” And there’s the key. By acknowledging his dependence upon God’s gracious restoration - how can he possibly be worthy to stand in the presence of God – Isaiah’s guilt departs, and his sins are forgiven. He is blessed with the courage to say, “yes, here am I; send me,” even though he was clueless as to the heaviness of the message he was called to deliver. Paul, similarly, had no idea what he was getting into when he said “yes” to God. He did know, however, that he had to let go of his agenda and his ego, readily admitting, “I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an

---

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Harvest Books), pp 8-9.

apostle.” Once Paul, like Isaiah, humbled himself and accepted God’s grace, he was able to accept God’s call: enduring cold, hunger, threats, beatings, and imprisonment.

And what about Simon Peter’s story? How many of us can honestly say that, were Jesus to show up today and ask us to drop everything – job, family, home, security, and the most economically successful day of our life – we would immediately agree and follow him? Just prior to boarding his boat, Peter witnessed the healing of his mother-in-law by Jesus, as well as a multitude of additional healings and exorcisms. He was amazed by the miraculous abundance of fish, but he was more amazed by Jesus’ mercy and forgiveness. “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Peter says. There’s the key. Like Isaiah and Paul, he humbly recognizes his inadequacy before God, but he incorrectly assumes Jesus doesn’t want anything to do with him. He is astonished to hear: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” Jesus calls Peter into a loving, active, and transformational relationship. God doesn’t call us because we are worthy, we are worthy because he calls us. When Peter was able to let go of *his* ego and *his* agenda, he opened the door to God’s grace. It was only then that he was able to walk away from his fishing nets and into a life of discipleship.

In reality, most of our call stories, thankfully, follow a less terrifying path than that of Isaiah, Paul, and Peter. But we all have one. Isaiah, Paul, and Peter had extraordinary call stories, but they were not extraordinary people. They had fears, joys, disappointments, laughter, and sorrows just as we do. We all are called by a loving God who desires a loving relationship, despite our shortcomings, and despite our refusals. We are all called to humbly bow before God, confessing our shortcomings and our refusals, to let go of our own agendas and egos, and to open ourselves to the overwhelming invitation of partnership with the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God's call to us is also not static. Rather than being stagnant, calling is best understood as a dynamic process that changes with time, age, location, and circumstances. It isn't limited by our resources or our abilities. Calling is a movement, a constant conversation with God and others, as we seek to live *in* the glory of God and *for* the glory of God. A doctor called to minister to the sick may have to close her practice and instead comfort and care for her aging husband. A father called to cook for his children may also be called to use his appreciation of food and God's abundance to feed the immigrant, the refugee, and the homeless. A young and talented athlete may be called to a different ministry after a debilitating illness or injury. A call is not static.

What does the Lord require of you, asked the prophet Micah. And then, answering his own question: "To do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." When we humbly accept God's partnership invitation, God graces us with the courage to say, "Here I am; send me." When God is in our minds, in our hearts, in our conversations, in our discernment, and in our priorities, we are graced with the courage to continue in our calling. My prayer for you is that you may, with God, and in community with others, humbly and continually discern your call. And I pray, for you and for me, that no fiery flying snakes are involved. Amen.