

Can You Hear Me Now?

“Isaiah’s Call”

[Isaiah 6: 9-13](#)

For the past three weeks we have heard pastor Oak-Yean talked about “the call to ministry.” She talked about the call of Abraham, Moses, and Samuel and how God used and continue to use humans for the purpose we were created. This morning we will look at the call of Isaiah. There are similarities and difference in these calls. However, what is peculiar about Isaiah’s call is that he volunteered to go when God asked, “whom shall I send and who will go for us? Isaiah never questioned the mission of his call like other prophets did. He volunteered without hesitation. Without even knowing the details of the mission...he said, “Here am I, send me...” We should be aware of the fact that Isaiah’s situation and call was difficult. He was to pass judgment on his people, and a judgment himself should suffer because he was part of that community. Isaiah was to “tell the people to listen but not comprehend, to look but not understand, he is to prevent the people from understanding, hearing or seeing lest they see and be healed...” (Isaiah 6: 9-13). Wasn’t this a difficult task?

Those who were called in biblical times or even today are commanded to do specific or multiple tasks. In the days of the prophets like Isaiah, getting the messages right was essential for a messenger or prophet but putting it in the right context was much more important. Isaiah’s context therefore was not just simple. God used him in a specific context just as God uses you and me in our specific contexts.

With these said I seek to prove in this text, that God intervenes in history through human vessels. God has done it in the past and can do it through you and me today. All we need like Isaiah did is to be willing to say “here am I, Lord, send me.

Isaiah was called to ministry the year King Uzzaiah died. King Uzaiah was probably one of the best Kings Judah ever had in biblical times. By then the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom called Israel and Southern kingdom called Judah. Israel and Judah were in some social, political, and religious mess. Nothing seems to be working for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as they waged internal wars against each other. Assassinations and conspiracies against each other were the order of the day. Morality fell, backstabbing and killings were rampant. Internally the kingdoms were weakened. Internal conflicts gave rise to external forces to infiltrate their borders and also infiltrate their political, social and religious systems. Political conquests by Assyria and Babylon were rampant and Israel and Judah were captured several times and enslaved by foreign powers. The Northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria and Judah fell to Babylon and was taken into what we call the Babylonia captivity. The Israelites were sent into exile. The Jewish dispersion started in earnest. Israelites were frequently taken into captivity, enslaved and dispersed to foreign lands and other people were brought to occupy the land of Israel causing intermarriages which did not allow for a coercive society by then. The people of Israel hadn’t remained faithful to their God through these periods. The old standard of life had largely been rejected. Social injustices, such as op-

pression of the poor were widespread and other religions had infiltrated into Yawhehism. The security of Israel was shaky.

As history repeats itself, God always finds ways to deal faithfully with His children even when they turn their backs on Him. Despite the chaos, unfaithfulness, rejection, injustices God finds a way to appoint or encourage a prophet, priest with a messages for His people. This time it was Isaiah's turn. It is worth noting that Isaiah was already a prophet before he received this specific instruction of passing judgment on Israel. The position of the text may have been compromised which have nothing to deal with us this morning. All we know is that Isaiah was called to a specific task and that task was to meet the people of Israel with a message from their God.

Isaiah experienced a voice in the temple and the temple was filled with smoke. He was terrified. This is very unusual, he said. This is God. He cried out loud" I am a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips, Lord. How can I see you at this time? With that guilt and verbal pronouncement, angels who sang familiar hymns " Holy Holy Holy, Lord God almighty..." cleansed Isaiah (Isaiah 6:3). This is one of the Hymns we sing in church services today.

When the cleaning or ritual ceremony was over, Isaiah immediately heard a voice, a voice he said was the Lord's voice (verse 8) saying; whom shall I send. And who will go for us...? Then Isaiah without hesitating, said "Here am I Lord, Send me..."

What follows from this point in the text is a message of judgment for the people of Israel. Listen to this again though you may have heard it read: Isaiah asked when this judgment shall last? The Lord said:

"Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitants, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, and until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken"

Wow...what a judgment. I just imagine how Isaiah was at that very moment. But he was right to have asked for forgiveness before the commissioning. Clean me first Lord, before I can deliver such a message. I will do the same if I ever find myself in such a position.

But listen again to the final words which seem to be words of hope:

But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land (vs13). There was Judgment on one hand and hope on the other.

Some biblical scholars relate this vision with other visions of Isaiah like "Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and the thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you, and his glory will appear over you, nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Isaiah 60:1-3).

Isaiah had a vocation already among his people. In the midst of doing his work, he was further instructed to carry out another task. At the end of the judgment he was to pronounce the coming of a messiah whom he saw seated on a throne.

Judgment and hope for a nation that has been on the run for many years and who have been immigrants and refugees for the most part of their lives and settlement. Indeed God does and can intervene in history through human vessels. Isaiah was to be that human vessels and he hesitated not. He carried out the task and pronouncing hope of the coming messiah to help Israel out of the mess.

As I reflect on this call I am reminded of my call to ministry, which started, in my native country Sierra Leone. Like Israel my native country Sierra Leone was in a mess. There were internal conflict, corruption, mismanagement of public funds and it was even difficult for 95 % of the working population to survive on a dollar a day. Children, age five were drafted into war and child soldiers, girls were raped at age five, women were raped and pregnant women were torn into pieces to know whether the child they have is a boy or a girl. Morality like in Israel failed and God was nowhere to be found. Many people lost faith and hope in the God they trusted and a God who promised to save them. The results and reasons you see some immigrants and me among them in these pews and in the USA today.

I was either in the classroom teaching, or church preaching or leading, or in the bush working with United Nation or ECOMOG to help disarm child soldiers and bring them from the bush. Some were dangerous missions or vocations but I did say here I am, send me Lord.

Even as I was called to pastor and teach, I was also called to some specific task to work disarm and admonish child soldiers, soldiers and rebels in the war front. I made an impact in the lives of many who are presently alive and seeing more days and years today.

I left for the USA in 2000 and then work with my brothers and sister in a typical African indigenous church. And then, I decided to come to Campbell UMC and then, Dick Corson told me to take my two legs to Pacific School Of Religion. And then the African ministry was born and then we have an African ministry choir now serving the Campbell UMC church as an auxiliary to the chancel choir...and then and then, and then we are still here: saying "Here am I, Lord. Send me."

Like the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs: from Abraham/ Sarah down to the formation of the judges. From the institution of the monarchy in Israel to the fall of the Northern kingdom From the New Testament authorities and down to Jesus and us today, we are all immigrants in this world always on the move. But God intervenes in our history through the very human vessels he created no matter who you are, by skin, color, language, tribe's sexual orientation or political affiliations.

We have a lot of ministry opportunities at Campbell today. Each one of us is called to ministry. It could be multiple or specific. It could be a call to help our children in Sunday. Whom shall we send to teach the

kids? Our kids need Sunday school teachers and there is a cry for more to help out...but who will volunteer.

We need youth and young adults volunteers to help carry out the ministry of the youth.... whom shall we send?

We have the need to continue our jail ministry at Elmwood jail, Rose Mary School, who will go for us? We have a hospitality ministry for coffee hour, greetings users, music; who will step in...?

But wait, we promised to cross borders for the sake of love. That means whom shall we send to help with immigration issues; immigrants who suffer humiliation because they cannot provide authentic documents for survival. Immigrants, who were forced to leave their native countries not because they wanted to, but because they want to save their lives and the lives of their children. Immigrants who are looking for a better chance of survival for themselves and their generations yet unborn. Who shall we send?

Remember John Wesley was always on the move, an immigrant, but I never heard or read he was molested or had any problem anywhere with documentation. As demonstrated in the Bible, John Wesley also admonished us through many of his sermons and actions to help the strangers especially those who are unable to do so for themselves.

When we volunteer to a call “here am I send me” we are answering to radical hospitality and compassion. We are religious people who should promote radical hospitality and compassion. And as Frank Rogers Junior, a spiritual director in one of our UMC seminaries in Southern California states “when true to their spiritual essence, religious traditions do no more than deepen people’s connection to the compassionate source of life, restore people to the fullness of love and loving vitality, and send people forth with expanded capacities to be active embodiment of compassion in the world...”¹

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a lot to do and it is high time we stepped up again and again and again to answer to the calls and say with conviction “here am I Lord, send me.
AMEN

¹ Frank Rogers Jr. “*Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus*” (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Book, 2016) 10.