

“Into the deeper waters”

February 7, 2010

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 5:1-11

I.

In our reading from **Isaiah 6**, known as *the call of Isaiah*, Isaiah is in the temple. We're not told anything more about the circumstances. He's in the temple.

We might ask ourselves, *What's he doing there?* Is he in some public gathering for worship? Are there other persons around? I've always thought he was there alone. But if so, why?

Does he perhaps have some sense that he needs to be there ... in the temple ... in the sanctuary of God? Does he sense that he needs to go a little deeper, seek a deeper understanding, a deeper sense of God's ways and of God's purposes for his life?

Given the historical context, it's certainly understandable that he, or any Israelite, would go to the temple from time to time. These were turbulent times for Israel. Again, waywardness had, little by little, nudged Israel into a sinking pattern of dimming prospects.

- Too often, she had gone her own way, turning away from God.
- Too often, she had exploited the poor and left the needy unattended.
- These were times when darkness was on the horizon, grief seemed around the corner and uncertainty was everywhere.

In any event, Isaiah is in the temple and he has this mystical experience, this powerful experience of *the holy*, that humbles him to the core and totally redirects his life.

Isaiah discovers first hand the wisdom of author, **Annie Dillard** who observed:

When we go to church we should wear crash helmets, receive life preservers and be tied to the pews just in case God shows up.

II.

My guess is, Isaiah wasn't in the temple that day by accident. He knew he needed to be there. Don't we, too, sometimes have the sense that we need more of God; that, fervently, we need to seek more of God's presence, more of the holy, and that we need to move out into the deeper waters of our faith?

Don't we know, on some level, when things aren't right with our lives; when we're, perhaps, not on track; when something is missing, when we've lost the vision, the power

of God's presence in our lives?

Aren't there times, too, when we wonder where God is? Where is the *holy one* in our midst? The One who helps us stay centered in our life ... who gives us—everyday—a sense of reassurance that life is good? That we are loved and valued?

What to do when our world seems to be coming unglued and unriveted, with uncertainty all around?

Remember the first Sunday after 9/11, all across America, in all faiths, our sanctuaries of worship were full. There was a sense that *we needed to be there*, to probe deeper into our faith, deeper into the truths of our foundation as a people. Not unlike Isaiah in the temple, we needed some foundational reassurance.

III.

And then, as if out of nowhere, Isaiah has this vision of God—high and lofty, God's robe fills the temple. And there are attendant angels ... each of them with six wings: two to cover their face, two to cover their feet and two for flying. And they're calling out to one another,

***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of God's glory.***

And immediately, the pivots of the temple shake and it is filled with smoke. And Isaiah says:

Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live with a people of unclean lips. Yet my eyes have seen the holy God of Israel.

Then, with a live coal taken from the altar of God, one of the angels touches Isaiah's mouth and says: *Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt is gone and your sin is blotted out.*

Then Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord saying, *Whom shall I send, and who will be my messenger?* And he says, ***I will go, Lord, send me!***

Friends, aren't there times in our lives when—simply put—we have to go deeper to get underneath the surface, the everyday, the mundane? Why? Because there's an uneasiness of the spirit; there's a restlessness in the soul?

Sometimes, the answers to our deepest yearnings and worries only come when we move out into the deeper waters of our faith where trust and hope join hands in a harmony of spiritual insight and self-discovery.

IV.

As people of faith, shouldn't we always be ready to be surprised by grace, that a new awareness might come over us? The *deeper waters* of faith are always awaiting us.

Peter and his buddies learned this first hand in the reading I shared with us from Luke 5. They had been fishing all night and were, now, washing their nets, ready to pack it in until a later time. Jesus suggests to them, very simply,

Put out into the deep water and let your nets down for a catch.

Simon Peter is tired, worn out by long and frustrating hours of fishing with poor results. But what is he to say? It's Jesus and Jesus is asking him to *push out into the deeper waters and give it another go.*

It's like some authoritative person giving us advice after we've tried virtually every possible angle. We want to say: okay, okay, I'll do it ... but I don't see the point.

Of course, in the biblical story, the deeper waters are a metaphor for a deeper experience of faith and of life's possibilities.

V.

Friends, when we go into the deeper waters in our faith journey, a couple of things happen. To begin with, as with Isaiah and Peter, we see more clearly who we have been, who we are, and who we are called to become.

In the process, we see our short comings.

Woe is me for I am lost, said Isaiah.

Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man, lamented Peter.

Sometimes, the only way we can go deeper and find the healing and renewal we seek is through personal confession. It's not that we're bad people; that's not it at all. It's just that often times we get stuck in our lives and we need to find ways of moving on and getting out of our rut. And we need to take it to God, confess it and get it out of our system.

Next, we need to open ourselves to the new person we become and the new future that awaits us. This is seldom as easy as it might sound. Naturally, we resist change, even the change that brings us the most personal growth and transformation. We're like that aren't we?

But in the **deeper waters of faith**, we're able to rise above any inborn resistance to a new awareness—like Isaiah in the temple and Peter in the deeper waters in the boat with Jesus. And we're able to know again ...

That the whole earth is full of God's glory. If we can only see it ... and grasp it ... and believe it ... and celebrate it.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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