

**Is 6:1-13; Ps 138; I Cor 15:1-11; Lu 5:1-11**

**Sunday, Feb 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

There is no form to fill out, no agency where you can submit your resume for the job of prophet.

You don't see want ads for the position in the newspaper or on line. Can you imagine?

*Wanted: Prophet to foretell and interpret events. Must be in touch with the Almighty. Must have a 90% or better accuracy rating. Must be articulate, willing to travel...We do not see such a thing.*

Job security is also uncertain for prophets. There is the accuracy issue. Consequences for prophets whose forecasts don't come true is extreme.

They were drawn and quartered, hanged and decapitated. Retribution was swift and bloody, when the prophecy did not happen. Then there is the whole issue of whether the prophet is in or out of favor with the ruling administration – also, whether the prophet is accepted or rejected by the priests and scribes. The politics of being a prophet are complex – very tricky. Serving God is a life-and-death matter. Dealing with God is not optional – you know, “take it or leave it” sort of thing.

Isaiah chapter six tells the story of the prophet's call to ministry. We see the fearsome, smoky, shining presence of God in the temple at Jerusalem. The building shakes – the huge, heavy doors rattle on their hinges. Sometimes God goes for long periods of silent watching – patiently waiting for his chosen to come to him. But sometimes (as in this passage from Isaiah) God appears to his chosen with manifestation and awesome evidence of his great power. Annie Dillard says: *“On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake some day and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”* (Teaching a Stone to Talk, Harper & Row, 1982)

Isaiah's encounter with God is awesome. We realize we do not have a God. Rather, **God has us**. Somewhere in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seems to me, the church in the United States lost sight of the truth of God's presence – the presence we experience through the eyes of the young Isaiah in the temple. Years ago, Keith Green sang this song: *"The world is sleeping in the dark that the church just can't fight – 'cause it's asleep in the light."* (*Asleep in the Light* by Keith Green) Proverbs 1 teaches us: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Isaiah was awakened by the awesome presence of God in the temple. It is not clear from the Scripture whether he was alone praying – or whether he was in the midst of a congregation. What is clear is that God has chosen to make his presence seen and felt to the young man. God speaks to him personally. And Isaiah is shaken. Thank God we have his narrative for the building up of our faith – the faith of the people of God.

The day Isaiah describes is a literal day. He was saddened to see King Uzziah die. Uzziah is counted as one of the good kings of Judah.

Perhaps Isaiah was in the temple praying after hearing the sad news.

*Uzziah's reign marked the height of Judah's power. He was a strong ruler. He expanded Judah's boundaries westward with settlements in Philistia, and exacted tribute from Amon. The nation prospered, and desert areas were reclaimed by water conservation. Jerusalem's walls were strengthened and fortified. Uzziah kept a large army. The nation's prosperity under Uzziah was thought to be a result of the king's faithfulness to God.*

*But, Uzziah's strength caused him to become proud, which led to his downfall. He burned incense in the temple, an act reserved for priests only. When the priests challenged him, the king became angry and was immediately stricken with leprosy. His son Jotham ruled for his father until Uzziah died. ([biblicalheritage.org](http://biblicalheritage.org), accessed 2/4/19)*

King Uzziah spent his last years living with the consequences of his sin of pride. He thought he **had a God** – but **God had him**. He came into the sanctuary with his own agenda – his own idea of who was in charge – his own power. Uzziah had

lost his servant's heart. Contrast this attitude with the attitude of the young prophet Isaiah. He sees the Creator God seated on his throne – so immense that the edge of his robe fills the temple. Flying around him fiery angels with six wings, announcing his holiness – announcing his power – and his huge presence that fills the earth. The praise of the angels shook the place. Isaiah was dismayed to realize that he was in the presence of the Almighty. His first thought was: “I am doomed. I have seen God – unworthy as I am and a member of an unworthy society – and now I must die.” One of the seraphim flies to him bearing a burning coal from the altar in a pair of tongs. He touches the coal to Isaiah's mouth. He tells him he is purified – cleansed from sin and guilt by the fire. It is a sacramental moment. The coal is the outward sign of God's amazing grace. The instant the young prophet is cleansed, he is called.

Immediately God says: **WHOM SHALL I SEND, AND WHO WILL GO FOR US?**” And young Isaiah says, “Here am I; send me!” He is so willing! He is surrendered to the will of God. Isaiah will represent the Lord to the people. Later on, the

apostle Paul would say, “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong...” (I Cor 1:27) The humility we see in Isaiah is pleasing to the Lord. When Peter saw the miracle of nets filled with fish where there had been none, he fell at Jesus’ feet. He saw that he belonged to his Lord. We are his too. He gives us his word; he gives us his grace; he makes us fishers of men as we embrace his will for us.

This is the character of God. He chose long ago to create human beings with free will. We cannot escape our sinfulness except by God’s grace. But God didn’t create wind-up toys that automatically do his perfect will. God desires his people to come to him in faith, joyfully – choosing him, just as he has chosen us.

The Lord seeks any who will be vessels of his word – his grace – his mercy. Today say, “Yes, Lord, I am yours. Here am I. Send me.” Amen.