

Sermon for Epiphany 5c  
February 6, 2022  
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]  
Psalm 138  
1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Luke 5:1-11

Pride and Shame seem to be the dominant sins I've witnessed in dealing with folks in my life. Generally speaking – Pride falls on men and Shame on women, but these are not gender specific. I find myself afflicted more by shame, although I also have my share of prideful moments.

“In the year that King Uzziah died...”

The introductory words to Isaiah chapter 6 mean little to us now, but it is a way of demarcating a time. We have those kinds of dates in our lives.

For my mother and her parents, it would have been:

“In the year that President Roosevelt died...”

For myself, it would be:

“In the year that President Kennedy died...”

For the Millennial generation:

“In the year that the Towers fell...”

These are Years that mark a stark shift from what came before and what came after.

In the genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew, Uzziah is named as in the line from King David to Jesus.

Uzziah was quite a successful king. His 52-year reign from 792-740 BC was one of the most prosperous for Judah since the reign of Solomon two hundred years earlier. It was a time of peace and prosperity and all was well until, the Bible says, pride led to his downfall.

Apparently Uzziah took it upon himself to burn incense on the altar in the Temple, much to the chagrin of the high priest and 80 of his fellow priests, who confronted him about doing something he was not consecrated to do – as were the descendants of Aaron.

Things did not go well for Uzziah. An earthquake cracked the Temple, the sun shone on the king's face, and he was struck with leprosy. Pride goeth before the fall.

“In the year that King Uzziah died...”

Isaiah expresses his unworthiness and wonder: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

This is the second call story we've read in as many weeks, and on a Sunday in which “the CALL” seems to be the topic of the day.

Last week the Lord God declared to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

And Jeremiah reluctantly responds: "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

Likewise, Paul, no stranger to prideful moments, in the Epistle reading belittles himself: “For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

And Peter, who goes from blunder to blunder, falls on his knees before Jesus after a record-breaking catch of fish and pleads: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

I'd venture to say that most of the folks who are called to a ministry, whether it be Lay or Ordained, would tell you they do not feel worthy of the call.

For myself I ignored the call for twenty years.

The first time came at Christmas Eve Midnight Mass at St. John's Episcopal Church in Lafayette, Indiana.

I'd come to the Episcopal Church two years before. I'd been in recovery for about nine months. Linda and I had married at the end of October.

I was walking forward to receive communion. As I approached the altar rail I heard a voice say: "Be a Priest."

I turned to see who had spoken, but there was no one there.

I ignored the voice and didn't acknowledge it for two decades as, apparently, God guided me to add to my skillset to be able to do what God wanted of me.

I finally answered the call twenty years later and 1,300 miles from that altar at St. John's, but feeling worthy? Not then and not now.

The Lord tells Jeremiah: "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

Isaiah has a hot coal touched to his lips by a seraph, which tells him: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

Paul will relinquish his shame and say: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them--though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

Jesus tells Peter, who will at the end of his life declare himself unworthy to be crucified as his Lord, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." And Peter and James and John left their boats to follow Jesus.

Worthiness has little to do with being called by God. Unworthy as I am, unworthy as we all are, we are called by God to be the Body of Christ and to build up the Kingdom.

Isaiah then hears "the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Send me? I've asked the usher to pass the plate. Please take one of the pennies. It is my gift to you.

We, each and every one of us are sent. We may not be sent to a far off land. We may not be sent even across the state. We may not be sent even to cross town. But we are all sent.

Take a look at your penny. They're shiny copper. You can see Abraham Lincoln on the front side. His birthday is actually this coming Saturday. If ever a man's face showed the pain and the cost of being chosen...

So, turn the penny over to the back side. What does it say at the top? One Cent.

I'd like you to put this in your wallet, your purse, or somewhere you will know. Every so often, take it out and look at it. Let it remind you of Isaiah's words: "Send me."

Whenever you wonder who can do the will of God, who will God rely upon to do the work that needs to be done – remind yourself that you are the one sent.

I know it isn't spelled the same, but it sounds the same. Let it remind you:

- Whenever someone is in need – you are the one sent.
- Whenever a wrong needs to be called out – you are the one sent.
- Whenever a kind word is needed – you are the one sent.
- Whenever you ask yourself, is it me – you are the one sent.

"Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy. " for I am only a girl. for I am only a man. for I am only a woman.

There is only you, and you are who God has chosen to be in that situation. Open your eyes and remember you are the one sent.

Amen.