

“The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said, ‘Woe is me!’” The prophet Isaiah is having a vision that is both vivid and frightening. Everything is immense. The hem of the Lord’s robe fills the temple. There are seraphs, great celestial creatures with six wings. There is shouting, trembling, shaking and fire. In all this, the prophet realizes that not only is he privy to amazing sights and sounds, but he has also seen the God, the Lord of hosts. The prophet also knows that seeing the face of God brings death. He is living among a people of unclean lips, and he is the same; he feels afraid and without hope. Can you imagine the scene? With but a little imagination we almost feel his awe and fear.

Sometimes the Bible, in addition to being God’s word to us, the story of our salvation, theology, and literature, the Bible is also very good theater. Imagine what a movie director would do with this story. The prophet wails, “I am lost!” and this great winged creature swoops down, takes a live coal from the altar, and touches it to Isaiah’s lips. The special effects would be spectacular -- so spectacular that perhaps we would lose the real point of the story. (I have never experienced an absolution of sins like that!) Our church confession and absolution are amazingly – plain – in contrast to this scene. The point here, in case we have forgotten where we are, is that the people have become so unfaithful, so far living like a people of God, that even God despairs. God asks “Whom shall I send (to these difficult people)?” It’s a rhetorical question, with the newly cleansed from sin Isaiah at the ready: “Here am I; send me!” (Please just get me away from these seraphs.) That ends Act 1. The stage goes dark.

Imagine single spotlight in front of the heavy theatre curtain, and from the bath of light, we hear the message from God that the prophet must share with the people. “Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand. ... Make the mind of the people dull so that they will not understand and be healed.”

The people have ignored every message that God has sent so far. Until they hit bottom, they will not repent. Our brave and selfless prophet has a difficult mission, but he has been anointed – cleansed with fire! – and God will be with him at every utterance. It is similar in today’s gospel.

In this passage from Luke we have one of the great fishing stories. Jesus is beginning his ministry. He has been baptized and is anointed for a ministry. He spends forty days in the wilderness praying, facing temptations, and now he comes to preach and teach. What a contrast to the grandeur of the Temple! No seraphs, no smoke and fire. Jesus begins his ministry among ordinary, even common people: fishermen, farmers, women, and children. Imagine how a bunch of professional fishermen felt when Jesus the carpenter told them to put their nets out again for a catch. With the eye rolling perfected, perhaps, only by a teenager, Peter says “We’ve worked all night and caught nothing. But if you say so .... And their immediate catch of fish almost breaks the nets.

But the boatload of fish isn't the point of the story. It really doesn't matter how Jesus managed that miracle. The same goes for the vision of Isaiah: it really doesn't matter how the Lord's hem filled the temple or the prophet got his lips singed and didn't die. *The point of both passages is that God expects each of us to take a part in building the kingdom of God.*

Jesus does not need a grand space, or an ancient scroll, or even a beach, to teach. He does often do big things, however, to get our attention. Sometimes the God messages in our lives come in whispers. Our truth is that we are anointed in our baptism – every bit as anointed as Isaiah, Jesus, and as Peter in today's reading. It does not matter whether or not we are powerful in the world, the community, or even in the church.

Notice that neither Isaiah nor Peter, nor many of the other great people of the Old and New Testaments: David, Mary, Joseph, Anna, Simeon, were numbered among the high priests or important government leaders. These readings are part of real inspiration to all of us who are called to make a difference right where we are.

The gospel message from Paul's letter to the Corinthians is the same. Paul writes about his own call, reminding the Corinthians that it is only by the grace of God that he became an apostle. We, too, are supposed to continue spreading the good news of Christ. We tell that good news every time we pray the Nicene Creed: that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day." At the end of the chapter, Pauls remind the Corinthians that they, too will be raised from the dead and that Christ will come again; what happened to Jesus will also happen to us.

Today we are called to live a life of faith in the promises of God. Each time we say the Creed, we can remember Paul's words and the good news of Jesus Christ. We believe. This morning we are going to induct some women into a special order of prayer and service to the church and to the world. The Daughters of the King fulfill their baptismal anointing as part of a religious order of prayer, service, and evangelism. They wear a cross that says "for his sake; for Jesus' sake," we do this prayer and service every day. Without fanfare, my friends, you are lifted in prayer every single day by Daughters throughout the world. We are supported in the same bathing spirit of Jesus that found fish where there were none. Daughters find prayer when we cannot, when we can, and in every spiritual place in-between. With these women of Redeemer, in the diocese, and literally throughout the world, we are covered in prayer and service to God through Christ. Some might think that women of prayer might not show well as theater, but I can only imagine the sight of thousands of women, heads and bodies bowed in prayer, sharing the good news of Christ, of buoying our service in the name of Christ. Their ministry is a particular call and one way to share the good news of Christ. They inspire us to ask what our ministry is in letting ourselves and others know that no matter what may happen in our lives, good or bad, we are part of God's family and God will be with us.

In this season of Epiphany, of the revelation of Christ to us, what today is being revealed? That we are to be bold in our specific call, in using our particular gifts from God in bringing people to know Jesus, to live a life of faith within which God is always with us. Empowered by Jesus' Good News we go out again, letting down our empty nets one more time, even in seemingly barren waters, in the surety of faith that God will fill them. Thanks be to God! Amen.