

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13)

^{6:1} In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "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!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" ⁹ And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.'" ¹⁰ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." ¹¹ Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; ¹² until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. ¹³ Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Commentary

Set approximately 736/35 B.C., we find Isaiah in the Temple to gather strength and to pray for the people upon whose deaf ears the word of God has been falling. Will they ever listen to God? Will they ever turn from their evil ways? Is there any way to make them understand the covenant with YHWH and how to fulfill their part of that covenant? When faced with the pure holiness and boundless love of God, humans become sharply aware of their own sinfulness. Confronted with the sanctity of God, Isaiah began to confess not only his own unworthiness but also the disrepute of his people, crying, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips!" (6:5) The touch of Isaiah's lips—what a spectacle to behold! To the twenty-first century reader, the vision of Isaiah may seem surreal, other-

worldly, a Hollywood creation complete with special effects. To trust such a vision, even one that touched all the human senses, would require tremendous faith. God required the purification of all—even if their hearts were hardened. This desire and promise was eventually fulfilled.

Reflection

Isaiah was confessing not only his own personal unworthiness but also the transgressions of his people. In our individualistic culture, do we take responsibility for the evil and injustice in our society in which we are implicated? Have there been times when we blame injustice on others and assume our own innocence?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

^{15:1} Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you--unless you have come to believe in vain. ³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Commentary

The fifteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians reminds Christians of the centrality of the resurrection of Christ. As proof, and in the tradition of Isaiah, Paul listed those to whom the risen Christ appeared: Cephas, the Twelve (one wonders at the omission of Christ's appearance at the tomb), more than 500 brothers and sisters, James, all the apostles, and then to Paul himself. Again, like Isaiah, Paul's vision of the risen Christ revealed to him his own sinfulness. Paul recognized that because of his own persecution of the church prior to his conversion, he felt himself to be an unfit choice to spread the gospel. Yet through God's grace, even he was entrusted with this precious gift. Perhaps the Corinthian church denied the Resurrection. Perhaps they relaxed their main beliefs to conform to the world around them. Perhaps they began to "believe in vain," and their faith was only superficial, not stable. Whatever the reason, Paul deemed a restatement of Resurrection, the core of the Gospel, as necessary to bolster the faith of his readers.

Reflection

What are examples of “vain belief” in the church today? How might the world see the Christian faith as “vain belief” regarding the discrepancy between what we say we believe and how we live out that belief?

Luke 5:1-11

^{5:1} Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who are partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Commentary

Here, Luke gives readers another story of call and response. In fact, the call of Peter in Luke, of Paul in Acts (recalled in First Corinthians), and of Isaiah closely mirror one another. Confronted with the holiness of God as seen in the piercing, caring eyes of Jesus, Simon's first response was to confess his own sinfulness; for what other reaction could one have, standing in the presence of the Lord? Like his ancestors before him, Simon, going about his daily routine, stinking of work and the sea, was about to be invited to help change the world. Readers of the story are reminded of Simon and his partners, James and John, are told nothing about their merit or qualifications. They were ordinary men, at an ordinary place, doing ordinary things on an ordinary day. They went to the shore and followed Jesus into the extraordinary salvation history we call the gospel. No wonder Jesus began with, "Do not be afraid."

Reflection

When, where, and how have you experienced God's salvation and call in the ordinariness of daily life?

^{138:1} I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;

² **I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your
faithfulness;**

for you have exalted your name
and your word above everything.

³ **On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.**

⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.

⁵ They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.

⁶ For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
**you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.**

⁸ The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
**your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.**

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.