

This message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Short for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for the fifth Sunday of Epiphany, February 10, in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen.

It is based on the following texts:

Psalm 138

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

138:2 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.

138:3 On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

138:4 All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

138:5 They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.

138:6 For though the LORD is high, God regards the lowly; but the haughty God perceives from far away.

138:7 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.

138:8 The LORD will fulfill God's purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Isaiah 6:1-8

6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of God's robe filled the temple.

6:2 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.

6:3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

6:4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

6:5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a human of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

6:6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.

6:7 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."

6:8 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!"

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,

5:2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

5:3 Jesus 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.

5:4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

5:5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

5:6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.

5:7 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.

5:8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

5:9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken;

5:10 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."

5:11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Our Bible stories for today hold a kaleidoscope of images:

The Gospel story has an earthy setting
with dirty nets
and smelly fish
and sinking boats.

Isaiah paints a picture of majestic mystery
with angels
and thrones
and full length robes
and voices so loud the threshold of the heavenly sanctuary shake.

In Isaiah's vision the movement is
from worship
to confession
to pardon
to messenger.

On the lake shore the story shifts
from teaching
to obedience
to miracle
to enterprise.

In the fish story Jesus does not ask Peter if he wants to fish for people, he simply tells him that is what is going to happen. Very Presbyterian.

In the Heavenly story one might expect God to thunder a command, but instead God asks; God pleads:
Who shall I send? Who will go for us?

Who will go for us?

...Both stories hold this moment,
this attitude,
this virtue of humility—
the awareness of human limitation in the face of God's majesty.

The response to Isaiah's confession is quite different from the response to Peter's.

In the case of Isaiah a coal from a fire is transported by an angel and placed on Isaiah's lips.

It seems that if Isaiah were to become a messenger for God, something profound needed cleansing in his speech.

The response to Peter's confession

"Go away from me, LORD, for I am a sinful human"

is not the fire of a coal, but the warmth of compassion "Don't be afraid."

"Don't be afraid. You are going to catch people alive."

I think the differences in these two stories illustrates that I cannot set up for you
some sort of road map, or grid or app to follow in order to be sure you are aware when God's call comes to you.

Every call story is just a little different.
Noah gets instructions for a blueprint;
Moses meets a burning bush;
Samuel a voice calling his own name in the night;
Mary comes face to face with an angel;
the magi see a star;
and Saul is blinded on the road to Damascus.
We don't even know how the widow of Zarephath got the message "Feed the prophet Elijah."

No, I am not sure how God's call will come to you. But I am sure it will come.
I am not sure where God is calling you to go, but I am quite sure God is calling.
I am not sure who God is saying you will catch,
but I am certain people need to be pulled out of the waters of chaos and into the lifeboat of God's grace.

I am also pretty sure that God's call is as much or more about going with, as it is going for.
When Barbara Brown Taylor was trying to discern if God was calling her to be a priest, she heard God say,
"Do what pleases you and belong to me."
"Belong to me."
God's call comes not from a tyrant's throne, but from a lover's heart.

Likewise, Jesus does not call us to tromp forward and go where God has not already gone.
When God calls, God goes before you, within you, around you and behind you.
God's call is to join God in what God is doing and saying and living and loving.
On this side of the cross,
God's call is a Resurrection call to go with the risen Christ into deep waters,
into the chaos of human confusion
and struggle
and illness
and cast a net of mercy over the rolling and troubled sea.

John Stendahl says *"To fish is to depend on the unseen, to be blessed or cursed by what is hidden in the waters."*
Some of the same is true of God's call.
The details are almost always unseen; the blessings hidden, sometimes for decades or even generations.
Sometimes the net that is cast brings up a single soul, flailing and in fear and in need of tender hands to transport it to healing waters.

Now we Americans like control, efficiency and predictability. We like to know what we are getting.
That's what McDonalds was built on: giving people the same thing over and over and over again.

But God's call is not predictable;
and God is not concerned about efficiency;
and God's call certainly does not leave us in control.

Steve Goodier puts it this way:

"But beware of this about callings: they may not lead us where we intended to go or even where we want to go. If we choose to follow, we may have to be willing to let go of the life we already planned and accept whatever is waiting for us. And if the calling is true, though we may not have gone where we intended, we will surely end up where we need to be."

We will surely end up where we need to be.

For some of you, that will mean going to a new place and living among a new people and having new adventures.

For some it will mean going to a new church, or a new school or a new job.

For some of you it will mean staying right here.

“If all that a believer does grows out of faith and is done for the glory of God, then all dualistic distinctions are demolished. There is no higher/lower, sacred/secular, perfect/permitted, contemplative/active or first class/second class. Calling is the premise of Christian existence itself; Calling means that everyone, everywhere, and in everything fulfills his or her (secondary) callings in response to God’s (primary) calling. For Luther, the peasant and the merchant—for us, the business person, the teacher, the factory worker, and the television anchor—can do God’s work (or fail to do it) just as much as the minister or missionary.”

Os Guinness on “The Distortion of Spiritual/Secular Dualism of Calling”

And since we have so many teachers, here is a word for you: *Teaching is a calling, too. And I’ve always thought that teachers in their way are holy--angles leading their flocks out of the darkness.”*

— **Jeannette Walls, Half Broke Horses**

As you receive this message of God’s call, receive it not just on my word, but from one another. Talk together about the call of God on your own lives. Seek out others and listen to their stories of God’s call to them. Be encouraged by what you hear and see and listen, dear friend for God’s loving call to you.

Now May our God who loves you
Call your heart in tender mercy
Call your mind in holy imagination
Call your body in joyful strength
And call your whole life in
Grace
Wonder
Honor
And
Peace
Now and forevermore.