



Mount Carmel Lutheran Church

God's New Vision and Fresh Word

Sermon by Pr. Christine Wenzel

on Isaiah 6:1-8 (Luke 5:8-10)

on Sunday, November 15, 2020 (24th Sunday of Pentecost)

If this reading from Isaiah sounds a little familiar, it may be because much of our worship derives its shape from Isaiah 6. Like Isaiah, our worship begins with a hymn of praise. We then move to the confession of sin, followed by words of forgiveness of that sin. At the end of our worship, we hear a call to service, "Go in peace, and serve the Lord." And our response is, "Thanks be to God."

All of this, suggests that our order of worship, is very old indeed. I find it rather intriguing that our worship is modeled after what the prophet, Isaiah himself, may have experienced some 2750 years ago in the first Jerusalem temple. Unfortunately, we don't get to experience the

Let's start with the last verse of our reading. Listen to verse 8 again, "I heard the voice of my Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' 'And I said, Here I am Lord, send me.'"

Now, we don't get the full reading of Isaiah 8. We don't get to hear what God has in store for Isaiah - what Isaiah has said "Yes" to. We are left hanging without the knowledge of what he is to do. And so is Isaiah at this point. He is the one and only prophet to say yes to God's call without knowing first, to what, and to whom, he is to go and prophesy.

At first, I wished I had included the whole chapter for today. But then I realized, there might be a good reason it ended where it did. If we keep reading, we hear that Isaiah is to announce to the people of Israel that their city will be ruined, and they will be taken into exile in Babylon. Once Isaiah hears what his call will be like, he might have responded like Moses, and all the other prophets, "Send someone else!"

I have to admit, that those were my words back in the early 90's when I sensed the call to ordained ministry. It took me 4 years to respond with a

resounding, “Yes.” At the time, I was trying to discern what I was going to do. I thought about going to med school, or pursuing law, but people kept telling me I should go to seminary.

When I finally said “Yes,” I sang, the hymn, “Here I Am Lord,” crying through the whole song, mainly relieved that I made the decision, and I knew in my gut that it was right! I had no idea if and how I was going to make that happen.

We lived in Alexandria, at the time, and the seminary is in St. Paul. This is way before computers, or Zoom, so I had to physically attend. Even though I had no idea what laid ahead for me – even though I didn’t know if I had the gifts to do this kind of work – even though, standing up in front of people made my knees shake and my lips quiver - I applied to Luther seminary, and was accepted. It was right after that, my husband, Doug, lost his job, freeing us to move to Minneapolis.

Like Isaiah, we are called every week to go and serve God, not always knowing, where, and to whom, God is calling us.

My husband’s memory is much better than mine. I find myself often asking him when something happened in our past. He often remembers because of important events that happened at the same time. “In the year our daughter was born.” “In the year that 9/11 happened.” “In the year my grandmother died.”

Often, our encounters with God are interwoven with the events in our lives. Our reading begins, “In the year that Uzziah died,” Isaiah saw a “vision of the Lord, sitting on the throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.” This is not a vision of God in some far-off heavenly throne. Rather, it is intimate and close, but also frightening and disturbing.

We may not have a vision of God as Isaiah did, but I would guess that all of us have experienced a sense of awe in God’s presence, often in unexpected times and places.

In times of crisis, or celebrations, or transitions in our lives, God meets us there – intimate and close, with a new vision or fresh word. You, as members and friends, are just beginning another transition in the life of your congregation. Watch your mail this week, for a letter from the president of your community of faith. Tim wrote about the results of the Insight Report, which so many of you participated in by sharing your thoughts and dreams.

A repeated comment from those interviewed said, there was a question of identity and vision. This year will be an opportunity to discern 3 questions:

1. Who are we – Identity.
2. Who is our neighbor – Mission.
3. And what is God calling Mount Carmel to do and to be - Vision!

In this time of transition and discernment, you may feel the experience of God working among you as frightening, or disturbing. But, remember, Isaiah did not know what his future would look like when he said “Yes” to God’s call. He did not volunteer because he thought he had the skills or the time God needed. Rather he laid his life before God, trusting that God had a plan, and that God would lead and guide him into the future.

It is my prayer that all of you may experience a sense of awe in as God meets you, often in unexpected ways!

So that in the future you may say, “In the year of Covid-19, in the year of racial violence, in the year of transition with Pastor Christine, God met us here with a new vision and fresh word.”

Thanks be to God, AMEN.