

Date: February 9, 2025 (Epiphany 5)

1. Texts: Isaiah 6:1-8; Ps. 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: our holy realignment.
4. Aim: encourage, empower.
5. Proposition: "Our enthusiasm for God's will springs from our realignment to God's will."

GOD'S HOLINESS, OUR REALIGNMENT

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"¹ Most sermons on this verse from Isaiah focus on the joy of responding to God's call. Most sermons are a rallying cry for more enthusiastic ministry in the name of God. "Here am I; send me!" It sounds almost childlike—an enthusiastic yes to God's invitation to serve him.

But Isaiah's enthusiasm was only possible because of his life-changing interaction with the Lord God of hosts.

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! 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!'²

God's holiness confronts Isaiah with the reality of his spiritual life. This life-changing experience made his enthusiasm possible.

So, here's the conclusion we draw from this. Enthusiasm for God's plan only comes after we realign our lives according to God's will. A life-changing interaction with the holiness of God is the force behind our transformation that empowers us with enthusiasm for whatever God is doing around, in and through us.

We're going to have to push a little more deeply into this exciting dynamic.

¹ Isaiah 6:8.

² Isaiah 6:4-5.

We all know God is holy, but very likely we've not really thought about the term. Let's start with one very important characteristic of God himself: perfection.

We all know that God is perfect love, perfect grace, perfect justice, perfect righteousness and all those other qualities of God. He is without flaws and is perfectly self-sufficient in all things. He is perfect.

When we human beings catch glimpses of his perfection—and only glimpses, for to perceive his perfection in its entirety would destroy our very existence—when we catch glimpses of his perfect love, grace, etc. that appears to us as holiness. God is completely other than we are. He is The Other. When we see that perfect glory, we interpret it as holiness. God's holiness is our perception of his perfection.

God chooses to share that holiness with us in small doses, as in Holy Baptism or Holy Communion. We ask God to sanctify people and some objects with his holy presence. Assuming that we are requesting this in good faith, God grants our prayers. So, churches and hardware are made holy. Bishops are set apart by a holy act of God. People and objects can participate in God's holiness, which springs out to us from his perfection.

Now we can easily understand why Isaiah responded in his way to God's holiness.

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!

Isaiah caught a glimpse of God's perfection, which he experienced as holiness. He understood in that moment that his own life was not marked by that perfection. He is lost. His people are lost. All have failed God. Remorse filled him.

Yet God allowed him to perceive that holiness. God revealed himself to Isaiah. The revelation which caused Isaiah grief also freed him from guilt. God declared Isaiah to be worthy by the fact of his revelation to Isaiah.

This had the effect of realigning Isaiah's life. He turned from his self-oriented ways. He opened his life to the life of God.

It is this drastic realignment that enabled Isaiah to respond with enthusiasm to God's call.

We have reached the application portion of this sermon. It is impossible to manufacture an experience of God's holiness. Any experience of holiness is the result of God's choice to reveal himself. All we can do is open ourselves up to the experience of God's perfection.

Fortunately for us Anglicans, we have deep traditions of approaching holiness. In the first instance we have the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. We also make good use of the Gloria, Sanctus and Agnus Dei, as well as other liturgical openings. We have set up many inroads into the holiness of God.

What we don't do very well is *expect* that holiness. We tend to treat God with such deference that we end up pushing him away. We think to ourselves, "I'm so bad at this Christian stuff, that God would never reveal himself to me. I'm not good enough."

The story of Isaiah tells us that God is wanting to reveal himself to us. So also the stories of the Magi at Epiphany and St. Paul on the Damascus Road. God longs to reveal himself to us and to have us experience his holiness. His self-revelation lies at the centre of our faith.

God expects us to expect him. We are to look forward in anticipation to the holiness of God in our lives. Yes, we may have to confess and repent, as Isaiah did. But we are to look for God's holiness.

It is with a life transformed by holiness that we can say an eager yes to God's call. Without such a transformation, it is highly likely that we will treat God's invitation as a work order, motivated by duty. Drudgery is hardly a synonym for enthusiasm.

So, look for opportunities to experience holiness. God is constantly revealing himself to us. When we perceive his perfection entering our lives, then his holiness becomes real to us. Look for holiness. Anticipate holiness. Seek holiness.

And, in that search, you will find both God and enthusiasm for his call.

AMEN.