

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one calling you to follow him, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Have you ever had one of those times or days that changed your life forever? I've had several. Once PJ and I were watching a movie. It was An Officer and A Gentleman. Afterwards I asked her what she thought of me going into the Air Force and learning to fly. Lucky for me, the only thing the Air Force would let me fly was a Big Steel Desk... Another time, I was minding my own business in Alaska when God spoke to me through the sermon of our Pastor. That led me back here to Ohio and Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus. There have been many times when things happened that changed the trajectory of my life. Not all of them were of God, but I know for sure God has used those times to nudge me in the direction that has led me here today.

As I prepared to preach on this text from Isaiah, I realized the prophet Isaiah was telling us about one of those life altering experiences. I always thought, like most Old Testament scholars, this was Isaiah's call story. This week as I began to dig deeper, I noticed the calling of Isaiah didn't happen in chapter 1. We're already into chapter 6 of Isaiah's story. You'd think, if this was Isaiah's call into the vocation of being a prophet of God, it would have been the first, or at least one of the first things, in the book. The Bible scholars have done all kinds of interpreting and maneuvering to explain this problem away. The more I dug the

more problems I discovered with this being the first calling from God to Isaiah. For example, why doesn't this story fit into the same format as so many of the other callings God made to people in the Bible. The usual way this goes is God speaks a Word inviting the individual to do some task. Then the person objects, usually protesting their unworthiness. This is followed by God's assurance that God's protection and blessing will be upon the person. Then the person reluctantly agrees. That's not the sequence of events here. Isaiah is in Church and God appears, or at least the hem of his robe appears. Without any verbal cues from God, Isaiah blurts out that he is done for. In the presence of even a tiny part of God he knows how unclean he is. God hasn't asked Isaiah to do anything and yet he's already protesting his unworthiness. It's like he's been here before...

That's when it struck me. This isn't the first rodeo for Isaiah. He had indeed been in this same position before. Perhaps many times. I don't know when Isaiah received his first call to be a prophet or if it entailed visions of heavenly beings like the Seraphim who constantly sing praises to God as in our story for today. What I can say for certain is this was one of those life changing moments for Isaiah. For some time, he had been speaking for God. When a prophet speaks the Word of God, we call it an oracle. Prior to our text for today, the Book of Isaiah records 8 oracles, all of which detailed how the Hebrew people had lost their way and the future catastrophes that awaited if they do not repent.

It must be hard to continue preaching and prophesying to a people who refuse to accept the authority of the oracles. I imagine Isaiah getting pretty discouraged. In the Book of Isaiah there is no direct evidence of Isaiah wanting to give up, but other major prophets, such as Jeremiah almost constantly wanted to bag it up and call it quits. So much so that we call Jeremiah the “Whining Prophet.” I believe Isaiah was having one of those moments when God appeared and recommissioned him for the hard road ahead. That’s how God works. When we get discouraged from doing what God has called us to do, God doesn’t abandon us to whatever forces are arrayed against us. God is always right by our side. Whatever our objection is, God has the answer. When God places a divine calling on your life, you can be assured you don’t walk the path alone. Isaiah prays to God and confesses his unclean lips. I’m really happy I’ve never used that particular objection. Not sure how pleasant having a burning coal laid on my lips would be... The point is, when we object, which is what we do, God finds a way, even when we think the task is impossible or when the thing God calls you to do is unpleasant. The prophet Jeremiah was once thrown into the sewer because he preached an oracle the people didn’t like. Being a prophet can be dangerous or at least smelly business...

God doesn’t call everyone to be a prophet. God doesn’t call everyone to be a preacher or a pastor, but God does call each and every one of us into some

vocation. You probably have several vocations. You might be a mother or a father, a son or daughter. You might be a nurse or a teacher or a farmer. Being a husband or a wife is also a vocation God calls some people into. The question isn't, **has** God called you, but rather, **what** has God called you to do. Just like Isaiah, you might have more than one calling. Most of us have several and most of us object, rebel, and sometimes run the other way from God's call. Remember the story of the prophet Jonah?

When was the last time you had one of those life changing moments? When that happened, did you recognize it as the voice of God speaking directly to you? When it happened did you enthusiastically raise your hand and volunteer or did you throw up every reason in the book for God to pick someone else? As I look around this congregation, I see many shining examples of those who followed God's call. You are following Jesus into the world, using the gifts and talents given to you by God serving others and bringing God's word to life.

Back in Martin Luther's time the word vocation applied only to God calling people to serve in some religious capacity. Luther and other reformers argued that serving as a priest, a monk, or a nun was no better than serving God as a carpenter, a farmer, or a housewife. According to Luther, we are called, not to separate ourselves from the world as monks or nuns, but rather to engage the world, especially the needy, the poor, and the oppressed. We're not called out of this

world with all of its beauty and all of its suffering, but into the world to bring the Gospel to bear. To notice and point out God's handiwork in the beauty and to serve and be a blessing when we encounter pain and suffering. Your primary vocation might be as a retiree, but that doesn't stop God from calling you into new adventures. When that happens, raise all the objections you can think of, but then, listen for God's answer. You never know how miraculously God will use your gifts. I hope you don't have to be purified with hot burning coals, or thrown to the bottom of a sewer, but I know if that happens or worse, God will be by your side and God will bring you through.

My guess is that every one of you has your own story to tell about that life changing moment when you heard God calling your name. Even more inspiring is your story of how God brought you through the peril or persecution you endured because of following that call. May you be blessed with the faith to see God's hand in all those life changing moments. May God's encouragement inspire you to persistence in the vocation God has called you into. May your discouragements and persecutions be few, but when they happen, remember Jesus said, blessed are you, when people persecute you because of your love of Jesus. You are blessed because God has called you and you chose to follow! Now, may you enjoy the ride! Amen.