

A TRIP WITH A PROPHET

Isaiah 6:1-8

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First Christian Church

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⁶In 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. ²Seraphs 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. ³And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

⁴The pivots* on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And 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!’ ⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The 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.’

⁸Then 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!’

Sometimes, I am curious to see what is outside the box. We all are, we just have to know! What do others think? How do they do that? Why do they do that? Is the grass REALLY greener on the other side? These are always good questions to ask, whether we ask these as reporting, or for learning, or for our own benefits, these questions always help to shed light onto our world, and help us to make stronger and more well-rounded decisions.

In my own calling into the Christian faith, I have found these questions to be fundamental to ask. Now, my background into the Christian faith is perhaps not very exciting. I have never had a lightning

rod moment, or a moment like Paul on the Emmaus Road. I was born into a small Disciples of Christ Church in Zearing, Iowa, and was baptized there when I was Middle School age, at the age when I was old enough to understand what the church was, and why baptism mattered. I later moved with my family to the Disciples Church in Ames, Iowa, and was active in the youth group, and learned a lot about why the church matters in the world, many Bible stories, learned about many different beliefs there, and a lot of other good foundational stuff. I went on mission trips and to camps as both a camper and counselor, and had a lot of good opportunities to grow an experience life in healthy and faithful ways as a youth. All of these experiences where, more or less, completely lived from within the context of the church and the faith. This was not the faith in a bubble, it was one that knew a broad range of things of life, but it was a walk that always had the benefit of church to help show the way.

When I arrived at TCU to go to college, I found this world in Texas to be one filled with evangelicals and all manner of people who were very passionate about their faith to the point they had to come to *my* door, or stop me on the street to tell me about it. This was very different from my sense of Midwestern sensibility I had honed for 18 years growing up, we don't really do that sort of thing very often in Iowa. I guess in many ways, us Midwesterners are sometimes bland! But these people had my curiosity these people who bombarded me with something different, and many of them were my age, a demographic that, while present in church,

is one that's statistically a thin group to be active in the life of any church today. My curiosity of the "other side of the fence" from my own church upbringing to this menagerie of other faiths was afoot, and I decided to explore these other faiths my first semester at TCU. This was not to convert, I had no intentions of transferring from my own faith, but I wanted to know what made my own places in the world of religion distinct and unique. Now this adventure lasted about a month or two, and two distinct sermons back to back in different places ended my interest in this adventure, one about porcupine reproduction, another about the color of heaven's floor tiles. For some reason, these just did not resonate with me, I think I can live several lifetimes and never have pondered these things. About this time, I found myself being called back to the more familiar world of my roots, and more exploratory interest to journey to visit the other side of the fence was satisfied, and I was also making connections with the Disciples on campus group at TCU.

Now, while I had made this adventure to learn from outside the box, if you will, to explore what made my faith distinct in the world, I also realize that even this question for most people is framed differently, I wanted to know why my faith mattered, and what made the faith I knew distinct. Many if not most of the people from my generation instead ask the question of why does the faith of religion matter. The people from outside and beyond the church know they have a spirit, and they know their spirit well enough to want to feed it, and they do this readily through

many forms and fashions of service to others. All people, inside or outside religion, know that feeding the hungry, caring for those who cannot care for themselves, loving those who know no love, and seeking justice when the world seems wrong are important things that when done, make a both the helper and helped feel good on the inside. However, we of the Christian faith know this to be the teachings of Jesus, and the way that God would have us to live, and this is where we find our spirituality, steeped in the collection of books that comprise our Bible that all speak to the depth, meaning, power and hope that exist within the doing of these things. We have countless stories, and we as Christians for the most part, have a lifetime of lessons on what these ancient stories are about. But the ancient stories of our Bible are just stories when they are read and not lived. The truths we know in God are nothing without hearts that beat to them, and lives to animate these stories in the world. And while most people know this, they do so without the benefit of the tradition, community and support of the church to do so.

This matters more than even we realize, especially if we want to pass along and share the faith that matters to us to those around us in the world. If, for example, we wandered outside of our box of what we already know about the Bible from our own years of being in the church, just forgot that for a moment, and read today's passage with the eyes of one who has never seen or heard this story, what would we take from this passage? If I did that, I would wonder what medical concoction this guy named Isaiah was

taking as he was writing about his trippy sounding six winged speaking animals.

Now, we as church know Isaiah is not crazy, nor is he a psychedelically warped author, rather he was an ancient prophet who has a foundational voice for speaking to God's eternal bent toward justice in the world. Isaiah's word on God's justice is not that of a calling to be holy rollers, no, that's not at all the people God is calling in this passage to do God's work in God's world. The seraph, that strange creature of six wings, it teaches that there is no series of rules and hoops one must jump through to be holy, that is not what holiness is about. Rather, this seraph reveals to Isaiah that God's love and redemption is more than eagerly doled out to all who seek. Isaiah makes it sound like the seraph's purifying actions are something as common as getting a glass of water, that is how eager God is to redeem, to sanctify all his children. Holiness, for the world of Isaiah, is the eagerness to embrace God's calling to depart from the place of holiness with action and justice for all, as one goes into the world.

There is more than one road and way of being a devoted follower of our faith, as there are those like Paul, Moses, and Isaiah that have had some profound moments of clarity in calling, and there are some like Thomas, those who never saw and yet still believed, I must say I am jealous of Isaiah's experience and calling, because I have never had such a profound experience, it still is a message that speaks today to not just

myself, but the church as well. We are called and already equipped to do likewise as Isaiah was, both to take and to share swift forgiveness toward others, and our service to go to others who need God's love and justice. But I come back to the question of earlier, the issue of why this matters to a world that is beyond or outside to the richness of these stories, traditions, and all the things of our faith. And the truth of this is, those who are spiritual but not religious, those who are wary of church, and would struggle to fit in, but serve in missions and in all ways to the community, they too share in the calling that Isaiah had, to do God's work in God's world, for all of God's people. It is a task we all already know well ourselves, this is a church that knows so many ways to serve God's children, from recovery ministries, to ministries that seek to keep children warm in the winter, to partnering with others in our community to help and serve in ways even we cannot do alone as a church, and to do things bigger than our church, like feed a city.

But Isaiah's message is one that is more than loving and being loved on. In some ways, it bears some resemblance to a graduation. Graduation is, aside from the well-earned moment to celebrate years of hard effort, graduation is at its core, the turning of the page to go out and do the things that one has been learning. We, like Isaiah, as beneficiaries of God's blessing and being made clean, are to return to the world in a way that shares that holiness and cleanliness. And in the case of God's cleanliness, it is not one that can easily gets dirty, rather, like the knowledge of

schooling, it does not go away, and it only rubs off on places it can do good. And there is a lot of good to be done in our world, especially when we listen to events in the world that still cry out with injustice. In places like this, we wish wholeness and holiness could be as simple as that seraph Isaiah spoke of made it seem.

However, where ever God may send us, we should know first that we will never nor can ever be beyond God's grace and love. We should know that the holiness, wholeness and cleanliness of Isaiah is not the sort that washes away, but rather it rubs off on that around us, it is like the spreading of a fire started merely by that hot coal. We should also know that this is not a small matter to respond to God's calling to us, rather, and likewise, we should realize that is a journey, an experience, a trip that we are invited to embark on, a trip with a prophet, if you will. While it is a long trip, one that stretches far earlier than out time, and it stretches into an ever changing and often as of yet unknown and uncertain future, it is an exciting journey, one that we, like Isaiah should eagerly embrace.