

February 7, 2010

Three Chopt Presbyterian Church

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The storm of the century! Snowmageddon! When have we ever had to face the decision about whether to have church because of a snowstorm – two weeks in a row! Please know that your church leaders have expended a fair amount of energy worrying over what to do. We almost canceled worship for fear that some of you would try to attend when your roads are not paved and your sidewalks are not shoveled. However, we decided to have one simplified and informal service at 11:00 a.m. This service is – now take this the right way, please – ONLY for those who live nearby and who find that they are able to safely get out of their front doors, across their sidewalks, into their cars, down their driveways and on to a plowed road. We have contacted for our church parking lot to be plowed and our sidewalks to be cleared – and hope that will happen by 11 a.m. However, this is not guaranteed. Those of us who are able to attend will worship in the sanctuary – everyone else is encouraged to worship at home. Again, please be careful! Now... let us attend to the scripture lessons.

The scripture passages are from Isaiah and from Luke. The Isaiah passage is the call of Isaiah – and a good follow up to the call of Jeremiah, which was the scripture for last Sunday. The Sunday on which we canceled worship, because of less snow than we have now! But, I digress. The call of Isaiah has some of the same elements as the call of Jeremiah. Specifically, Isaiah and Jeremiah have in common that they feel unworthy of God's call. Isaiah and Jeremiah also have in common that although they feel unqualified, although they feel unprepared, they still follow God's call. Isaiah says to God: "Here I Am, send me." Let us say this also!!! In spite of our fears and doubts, our insecurities, and inabilities, "Here I Am, Lord, warts and all, send me!" But, I am getting ahead of myself.

The Luke passage is the call of the disciples, Peter, James and John. It is the passage in which Jesus says: "from now on you will be catching people!" Fishers of men, another gospel reads, describing the same event. Simple fishermen are called to follow Jesus – and transfer their skills to be used in new ways. Like Isaiah, like Jeremiah, Peter feels unworthy. "I am a sinful man," he says. Actually, he says "GO AWAY from me, for I am a sinful man." Peter does not think he deserves to follow one such as Jesus whose miracles show he clearly is of God.

Now, get a cup of hot coffee or (yum, yum) hot chocolate, settle in to a warm spot, and read the following passages: (first say a little prayer that those who venture to the sanctuary on Sunday morning do not suffer any injuries)

## **Isaiah 6:1-13**

**6**In 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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." <sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup>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!" <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>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." <sup>8</sup>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!"

<sup>9</sup>And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.'<sup>10</sup> Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." <sup>11</sup>Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; <sup>12</sup>until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. <sup>13</sup>Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Wow! What a scene! Now switch gears to the New Testament. A less glorious scene, yet also an appearance of the Holy One. Jesus appears to simple fishermen.

## **Luke 5:1-11**

**5**Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He 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. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup>Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." <sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

We have had a little anxiety as we have watched this winter storm approaching. Now magnify that a gazillion, billion times and imagine that instead of a winter storm it is a foreign army headed right toward us. Isaiah is in Jerusalem, in the shadow of Assyrian domination. The little country of Israel is in danger, a pawn to a greater political power. It is a time of fear and uncertainty. Imagine the past few days as our weather forecasters scrambled to make an accurate prediction regarding the front that has been headed our way. Now imagine the people of Isaiah's time trying to predict what would happen as Assyria advanced. In the midst of this-- Isaiah has an encounter with the almighty God of the universe. After this encounter he will be sent to tell the king of Israel that he should trust in God, not in human power. After this encounter Isaiah will be sent to do a VERY difficult job. He is supposed to give the people reassurance and at the same time He is to hold the people accountable for their actions. Perhaps this is why God gives Isaiah such an amazing experience of the holy, in order to sustain him through his entire ministry. And – what an amazing experience it is. Isaiah's encounter with God is truly a mountaintop experience.

When I read Isaiah's experience of God's holiness I was reminded of the reason that we worship. We do not worship in order to get "points" with God. We do not worship in order to earn our righteousness before God. This is hard for us to remember right now, especially if we cannot make it to church – and especially if we are unable to attend two Sundays in a row! We worship in order to express our gratitude to the God who has created and called us. We worship in humility, knowing that we are broken, sinful people, and knowing also that God is loving and forgiving.

The call of Isaiah reminds us of the grandeur and majesty of the God we serve. The call of Isaiah speaks of God's mystery and "otherness." The call of Isaiah also reminds us of our own feelings of unworthiness. With Isaiah we receive God's forgiveness. May we also say with Isaiah: "Here I am, Lord, send me."

In the New Testament lesson the disciples are also called by God – through the voice of Jesus. The fishermen have been trying all night and have caught nothing. But Jesus approaches, tells them to cast their nets "deep" –and they do. But not after complaining. We have already tried! All night we have fished! In others, we have "already done that and it has not worked." Nevertheless, they are willing to follow – they are willing to go "deep" in perhaps new waters – and they receive more than they could ever have imagined.

Hmmm... what would it mean for us to follow the call of Jesus? What would we say to Jesus that might be similar? "We have already tried that. It didn't work." And what would it mean for us to "go deep" – to fish in deep waters – to try again, following Jesus, and finding a miracle we could never have imagined.

Friends, we are called to be "fishers of people." What in the world does that mean? How in the world can we "unpack" that metaphor? Fisher people know where to go to find the fish. Fisher people don't stay home and wait for the fish to come to them. Fisher people know fish. They study fish. They have the equipment they need to draw the fish in. There is a lot we can learn from fisher folk!!!

Isaiah and Peter both are aware of their sinfulness before God. Isaiah and Peter both receive God's forgiveness. Isaiah and Peter are both called forth into the world to serve. And – guess what? -- so are we. Like Isaiah and Peter, we are insecure, afraid, at times unwilling, scared, aware of our failings, unprepared, and the list goes on. But like both of these great men of faith we are forgiven, we are healed, and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Well, that is it for now. I hope you have enjoyed this little study of the scriptures for tomorrow. And, while I may start posting written sermons on line as a new tool of discipleship, I hope not to keep "meeting like this" with you in terms of the occasion that has brought us together in this way.

Blessings,

Brenda