

Pastor Roy's sermon from February 10, 2019

Children's lesson: What do people say you are really good at? What if someone who wasn't as good at it as you told you how to do it? What would you think? But what if what they told you, then, really helped you? What would you think about them? Some of the men who followed Jesus were really good at fishing. . .

Surrender/consecration

Imagine with Isaiah being caught up into the fierce presence of God. How do you react when you, however it happens to you, come face to face with God? Isaiah, like Jeremiah last week, doesn't make excuses for his sin and unclean lips. He simply confesses his feeling of unworthiness and incompleteness. He is deeply humbled and now he is listening. And right away he receives a message.

As with Jeremiah's call which we read last week, Isaiah is to assume the worst-- that the people will not listen until almost everyone is driven from the land in desolation. The nothing which remains will be the seed of newness, resurrection, the gift of God bringing new life. The seed is hopelessness and despair. It's as if God cannot work with an Israel which is good enough.

God's call to Isaiah is not about him and Israel getting it right. It's about him and Israel giving up on their own abilities and success. It's about them surrendering to God first. All the stuff he wants—he's got to let it all go. That is how consecration works. It's not about bringing our "A" game, our best effort, its about giving up that our best effort will ever be good enough or accomplish anything at all.

Last week Jeremiah was called to be **willing** to open his mouth and trust that God will fill it with the right words. God was calling Jeremiah to be surrendered and consecrated to God. So is Isaiah. That is the burning of his lips with the coals from the fire of the altar of God. It's the opposite of what we expect. And that is how life is.

Hope is from God and God alone. To the extent that we try to save ourselves and everyone around us, we are doomed. Hope does not come from me and you. I cannot help you. I cannot help myself. I can only give myself over to God. The sooner I recognize and embrace that, the sooner I will change from being a fake, a pretender, even manipulatively violent, the sooner we can let ourselves go. . .into God's grace—so that we can trust, and rest, and hope, so that we can live with compassion toward ourselves and our neighbors.

God's coming in peace cannot be stopped and it cannot be started. All we can do is receive. Be filled with hope and joy. This is true for every aspiration, every hope that is within us. We can't make ourselves be good neighbors, or good friends, or good parents, or good spouses. We can only surrender ourselves to God and then to the people we love and serve.

On to Luke. Jesus comes teaching from a boat. Simon must have thought to himself, "At least the boats are good for something since we failed last night." Until Jesus suggests they go out again, "Sure, whatever you say, Master, we'll put further out and drop our nets even though last night was a big zero. The fish are elsewhere. But, hey, you're the boss. Whatever you say, we will do, even though we really *do* know what we are doing."

Turns out the fish were closer than Simon realized. With Jesus there is unexpected abundance. Plus the invitation, "Now you will fish for people." And they followed him.

The disciples were not called to produce their own abundance, but to give themselves over to the abundance of God. Jesus invites the disciples to consecrate themselves to the work of loving people, serving people, leading people back to God. And there will be unexpected abundance. But it will be God's abundance not theirs.

Today, God is calling us to consecrate ourselves, to surrender to God's mercy in exchange for our own strength. Jesus calls the disciples not to have all the answers or make good things happen, but to simply follow. To be open and willing to go where the Spirit leads. And chances are good, like the promise of a desolate land to Isaiah, that we will rise up in the strength of God only after we have fallen down in our own strength. The power of the church is in her ability to trust. Not in her ability to get things done. May we be such a church, such a people. Consecrated, surrendered to the mercy and love of God—in every way. Not strong, but lifting up our weakness in humility to God and one another.

And there *will* be unexpected abundance, in unexpected places and unexpected ways.

Thanks be to God.