

FORMED FOR MISSION – 1/31/16

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10 (text: Isaiah 6:8)

Unison – print in bulletin – Isaiah 6:1-8

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. 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!”

Hymns: 1) 277 “Holy, Holy, Holy” 2) 564 “We Are Not Our Own” 3) 494 “We Who Would Valiant Be”

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: God is our refuge.

People: God is our rock and our shelter.

L: The Lord is our hope, rescuing us from trouble.

P: God knows us from birth, nurturing us with love and care.

All: Praise God, now and always!

INVOCATION AND LORD'S PRAYER

O God, you know us better than we know ourselves. You understand our worries and our fears. Open our hearts to your transforming love, so that your word may grow within us. Lead us to build a filled community so that we may share your love with the world. In Jesus' name we pray, "Our Father..."

Jeremiah 1:4-19 -

⁴Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, ⁵"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." ⁶Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." ⁹Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

SERMON

Last week, we heard a reading from Luke, about how **Jesus began his servant ministry in his hometown**. They were not impressed. They stared, and then discredited him. And Jesus said, "a prophet gets no respect in his home town."

That insight came not just from that moment but from the long Biblical tradition of prophets—which Jesus knew. And two of the most important, the Major Prophets, are the ones we heard from this morning: Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Jeremiah was called to share the word from God at the beginning of the exile, when God's people lost the Promised Land, and were forcibly carried away from the land to Babylon, the empire centered in what is modern-day Iraq. **Isaiah** is the work of a series of prophets who received God's word throughout the exile, beginning with the story we read as a unison selection.

While most of us can identify the great Old Testament event of the Exodus, **in our times we need to pay close attention to the other enormous event, the exile. It**

was a catastrophe; it was also the key process in the formation of God's people, so much so that in this time of exile, the people who had been removed from Judah developed practices of remembrance and worship that caused them to be known to the Babylonians, and then to the whole world, as "the Jews".

They lost the land because of what they did and didn't do. Most significantly their **inattention to God's priorities** and **reliance on their own sense of what to do, putting their trust in their leaders' personalities instead of what God required.** They believed, as Jeremiah reported at the outset of the exile, that as long as the temple was in Jerusalem they couldn't lose it; an ancient version of "too big to fail." But they were not too big to fail. They were overcome. They were carried away and their temple was destroyed. For a while they believed that all was lost. **But all was not lost.** Jeremiah and the several prophets writing as Isaiah brought words from God, telling what it would take to regain the land. **It was a call for the reversal of their former behavior: a call to pay attention to God's priorities. To acknowledge that what God requires is what should shape the lives of God's people. A call to return to reliance on God's word,** which the Jews finally, formally, wrote down, creating a written resource, the first five books of what became the Torah, and a commitment to doing what it said. It was not an easy process. **It took the urging and the courage of the prophets to push the people toward change.** And to remind the people who they were and whose they were.

These are words for us too. We live in a world where many people mistrust the church, sometimes with reason, as it is possible to hear hatred preached in Christ's name, and to find far too many examples where leaders of the church have abused their privilege and failed their people. Meanwhile, the competing and challenging claims of other faiths and scientific discovery make the followers of Jesus wonder how we should respond. We feel like the Jews of the exile - in their words from Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars

we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

**How can we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a foreign land?**

How indeed? Whether it's Babylon or a pluralistic, secular, divided culture, this is what God requires of us, the followers of Jesus, the Body of Christ: **to share what Jesus came to proclaim: the Kingdom of God is at hand, turn toward it, and believe the good news.**

Jesus had his troubles too. Last week we heard from Luke 4 how he stood up in synagogue, read words of Isaiah about what the Spirit of the Lord was doing, and proclaimed that these words had become true in their hearing. And they looked at him, and said to one another, isn't this the carpenter? Mary's son? Who the heck is he to tell us this? "A prophet gets no respect in his home town" Jesus proclaimed, and **then went forth to demonstrate by what authority he made these declarations:** healing and freeing and feeding people as signs of God's redeeming love, now present and active in the world.

So are you ready? Because in our own times, we too are called by God like Jeremiah and Isaiah. We are called, like the Jews were, to be the living stones of God's new temple. And the way to do that is also like the messages Jeremiah and Isaiah brought: pay attention to God's priorities. Acknowledge that what God requires is what should shape the lives of God's people. Return to reliance on God's word, and a commitment to doing what it says. **But we have one more overarching charge as followers of Jesus:** we are called to show and share the good news in all we do. And **what is that good news? It is this: Because of Jesus, God's judgment upon us is love and forgiveness, and by our baptism and our communion, we who are the church share in Jesus' death and resurrection, and we are to go forth to proclaim God's love for us, and the forgiveness of sins.** But we are not to do this in word alone, any more than Jesus did! We are called by Jesus' actions to put the good news into deeds, to love and care for ALL of God's children, particularly the poor, the downtrodden, the sick, the lonely, the broken

hearted. We are called by Jesus' teachings to work for justice for those who are oppressed. And by these acts, in the words of one of our well known hymns: **they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

Our call as Christians is to always be in ministry and mission to the world. **Jesus himself taught in Matthew 25:** when we care for these the least of his children, we are caring for Jesus himself. And when we fail to do so, it is as though we have ignored and shunned Jesus himself, and there is no room in the Kingdom of God for those who do that.

God's voice thunders from the throne: Who will go for us? Whom shall I send? I think Isaiah surprised himself when in his little, flawed, human voice, he said, **Here I am. Send me. I think we surprise ourselves too, when we find those words on our lips.** The objections are the same as well: I'm no good, I'm one person, the world is too messed up, what can I do?

But if we really believe what God has done in Christ, what Jesus taught, what the Holy Spirit did in forming the church, then in spite of the objections in our minds, the answer must be the same: here I am, send me.

So what is this sending? What is it we are supposed to do? It's not a secret. **It's in our church's mission statement! We are to be strengthened and formed by worship to go forth and serve humanity.** To feed people, and build for people, and care for people. Not as a duty, not to EARN God' love but as a way of expressing the love we've already freely received, a way of sharing the good news. Our good works cause our spirits to rise up within us to care for others as God in Christ has cared for us. Clutching our lives, our selves, to ourselves, has never made any one truly happy. It has never caused a spirit to soar. **We were made by God our creator to share and care!**

Now, we read the Bible and all those stories and wonder what is our story. Each of us has one. Each of us has something we can do. Remember the mustard seed: **the Kingdom of God starts small.** Maybe it's some bags of cookies baked for Crossroads or committing next Sunday morning to going downtown to Crossroads and making soup and sandwiches for hungry folks in Detroit. Maybe it's

comforting a family in grief by helping with the memorial luncheon next Sunday, or sending a card to someone who's experienced a loss. Maybe it's calling up an old friend, mending an old quarrel, or making a new friend. It might be buying cases of water for the people of Flint. We will have information on how to donate to their desperate needs in the planner and bulletin next week. **There are lots of ways to DO something to share God's love, all beginning when we say to God, "here I am, send me."**

In December, I introduced a series of ideas of ways that each person of this church might intentionally undertake three acts of ministry and mission in the period from Advent to Easter. I hope it's not limited to three—but that's a good start. Now as we head towards Lent, **I've put up a bulletin board in the link with post its and pens. Start writing down the things you've done, folks!** Stick them up there! And not just today: every time you come to church, add something new! Don't worry if your activity is already on the board from someone else, or even because you did it once and are doing it again—we are making a statement to ourselves and all who see this board—these boards, if we turn out to need another (and I hope we do!) That statement is this: **each of these things is important. But put together as a church, what we do, and encourage each other to do, becomes not just a few nice things, but a force in the world, a force for love and grace, a proclamation in word and deed of what we have from God, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit: that the Kingdom of God has indeed come near—it is here right now!** And no matter how challenging God's priorities seem to be, remember that God has made us and formed us and loved us into this transformation of the world through the power of love and care.

Throughout the coming weeks and into Lent, we'll be thinking together about this life, this project of following Jesus; its challenges, its questions, its rewards, its significance for the wider world.

But it all starts when we say it in our hearts, to our God: here I am, send me.