

Sermon preached at OCC, 9 February 2025

Lord God, in the reading and proclamation of your Word, may you illumine our minds and hearts, know and live according to your Word, equipped to follow Jesus in every part of our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit through Christ, our Lord, the living Word. Amen.

Becoming God's Messenger

(Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 5:1-11)

It may feel like Christmas was just yesterday, yet the world continues to change rapidly. Uncertainty, conflict, and fear seem to surround us. The long-awaited ceasefire in Gaza came suddenly, but new conflicts arose. The world appears greedier and scarier than ever. Even so, we find peace and comfort when we witness people striving to improve daily life, and we find courage in the compassion of God's word. Our task is to keep that alive. Today's readings offer insight into how we can do so.

Isaiah and Luke share a few things in common. First, both passages tell of God's call to be a messenger. Second, Isaiah and Peter confess their sinful state. Third, they accept the call and step into their new roles. But the call is only the beginning. Becoming God's messenger means learning to trust God under any circumstances.

The Call by God

When it comes to God's call, the first thing we must do is recognize it. Presbyterians don't often talk about personal spiritual experiences, including encounters with God. But do you remember when you first experienced God's presence—before or after you were called? I remember when God called me in my early twenties. Yet, I didn't realize it was a call to serve the Lord and God's people until decades later. What about you?

For Isaiah and Peter, their encounters with God were more dramatic.

Isaiah sees the Lord sitting on a throne in the heavenly temple, surrounded by seraphim singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Overwhelmed, Isaiah laments his fate. Why? Because he stands in the very presence of God's holiness, realizing his own unworthiness. The temple's carved creatures have come to life

before his eyes, and he is struck with fear. Encountering holiness means encountering something utterly other—set apart from all sin and impurity. And yet, God intends to call him. Through cleansing, Isaiah is made ready to be God’s messenger.

In Luke’s Gospel, Simon Peter’s experience unfolds differently but carries the same impact. This is not his first encounter with Jesus—Jesus has already visited his home in Capernaum and healed his mother-in-law. Perhaps that explains Peter’s willingness to let Jesus use his boat as a floating pulpit. At this point, Jesus has been teaching in synagogues, but now he steps into ordinary places, meeting people where they are.

After teaching, Jesus tells Simon to put out into deep water and let down the nets. Simon has been fishing all night with no success. He’s tired, ready to go home. Yet, despite his exhaustion, he listens. And then—an extraordinary event. A miraculous catch. Faced with this overwhelming display of divine power, Simon Peter falls to his knees: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Like Isaiah, Peter finds himself in the presence of holiness and sees his own unworthiness.

But Jesus responds with grace: “Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people.” The Greek word for “catching” here – *zogron* - means capturing alive. When fishermen catch fish, they may be alive for a time, but they will soon perish. When it comes to catching people, however, it is about bringing them to life in Christ. It is about freeing them from what binds them and calling them into God’s kingdom. But to become such fishermen, they must leave their former lives behind and follow Jesus.

So, what does that mean for us today?

Trusting God

We heard a lovely story about Fredrick and his family earlier. At first, the story might remind us of Aesop’s fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. You may recall the grasshopper, who spends his days singing while the ant works hard gathering food for winter. When the cold comes, the ant is well-fed and warm, while the grasshopper has nothing. The lesson is simple: prepare for the future. But the story of Fredrick offers a different perspective.

While his family works tirelessly to store up food for winter, Fredrick gathers something else—sun rays, colours, and words. When the food finally runs out, he shares what he has stored, lifting their spirits with warmth, beauty, and encouragement.

How does this relate to being God's messenger? From the beginning, Fredrick was already doing the work - collecting what his family would need to sustain them, not physically, but emotionally and spiritually. He was preparing to offer them something deeper, something that would carry them through difficult times.

And what about us?

Have we ever been discouraged in our mission—whether in ministry, outreach, or even in our personal callings—because of a lack of interest, lack of resources, or lack of results? Have we ever felt like we are working tirelessly with little to show for it?

Isaiah and Peter remind us that God's call is not dependent on our worthiness or ability. Their inadequacies didn't disqualify them, and neither do ours. Likewise, Fredrick's family faced scarcity, but Fredrick still had something valuable to offer.

Perhaps today, God is calling us to trust - not in what we see, but in the work. God is already doing in us and through us. Let us pray.

Loving Jesus, fisher of people, you called your disciples to catch not fish, but souls. Teach us also how to do this work. Make our hearts patient as we wait for those not yet ready to receive you. Help us trust in God when we step forward to share your love with the world. We pray this for the sake of the one who has already captured our hearts - Jesus Christ.
Amen.