

“Here I am God, Send Me!”

Isaiah 6: 1-8

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I met a kid at the dog park this week who wants to be a geologist when he grows up. He started talking to me about different kinds of rocks and telling me about his rock collection. In the course of our conversation I began to realize that I know very little about rocks. They are hard, they come in different colors, they are probably made out of different materials, but that's about all I know. Maybe I missed that week in school. Maybe I've just never been interested in rocks.

But this kid - this really enthusiastic budding geologist – he loves rocks so much that he assumes everyone else loves them too and therefore, knows as much about them as he does. Our conversation was similar to someone who has never seen a rock in their life walking into a graduate level lecture on geology. He was spouting fact after fact and I had to do a lot of, “Mmmhmmm”-ing to pretend I knew what he was saying. I didn't know. Not even for a minute.

As I was listening to this kid and my mind was wandering, I wondered if we ever create similar situations at church. I wondered if there are times when we are so excited about something and so passionate about something that we dive right into the deep end of a conversation or use insider language without checking to make sure everyone knows what the heck we are even talking about. I especially wondered if we, or maybe I, do this when it comes to scripture.

Every week we read a totally different passage from the Bible. We usually don't offer much of a background or explain what's happening in the rest of the chapter—we just read it. Then we read another seemingly unrelated passage. When we finish and close the Bible, everyone politely nods their heads assuring me they understood every word, and I launch into a sermon on that text. Sometimes I talk more about the passage, but usually—as I'm beginning to realize—I am so excited about what I

want to say about the text that I forget to make sure that everyone knows what the heck we just read. I become the boy in the dog park talking about rocks.

This week the story from Isaiah is one I really love. It is probably Top 10 for me in the Bible. To me, this is the story that explains what happens when we worship and why it is important for us to go to worship each week. But it's such a strange story that it is hard to get to that understanding if you are just hearing it for the first time or out of context. In it, we're basically told that when a King dies—a king we've probably never heard of—some guy named Isaiah has a vision of God that involves angels with six wings each singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy!”, there's an earthquake, a smokey house, and Isaiah feels inadequate until one of the angels puts a burning lump of coal on his lips, purifying him. *Then* God talks to him and Isaiah says, “Here I am God! Thanks to this clarifying vision you've given me I finally understand the meaning of life, and I'm ready to go out and serve you!”

No part of this story sounds like anything I have ever witnessed or heard about in this day and age. Much like the difference between sedimentary and metamorphic rocks, it requires a little explanation. So I want to fill you in on what is happening in this story because then maybe you will be able to love it too.

King Uzziah was the leader of Judah, which is modern-day Southern Israel. It's important for us to know that Isaiah is having his vision when King Uzziah dies because for him it would have been as important of an event as living through the bombing of Pearl Harbor or JFK's assassination or 9/11. It shook up politics and the economy and made everything a little uncertain. It was the kind of event that made people question what they believed in or what they were doing with their life. For Isaiah, it's a turning point. Around him, as people are grieving the King's death, their future feels unsure, and life is chaotic. There is pain and confusion. And it is during all of this that Isaiah has a vision of God.

The vision that Isaiah describes is one of majesty and awe. Even if six-winged angels called seraphs singing and the ground trembling and smoke filling a house doesn't fit our idea of majestic—for him is both majestic and awesome. Awe-inspiring even. In the midst of the turmoil around him, this

vision is his calm in the storm. Those angels sing him a song that reminds him that no matter what chaos is happening out in the world, “God is holy! God is glorious and God's glory is enough to fill the whole world!”

At this point, Isaiah is overwhelmed by what he sees. He does not feel like he deserves to have such a powerful experience of God. So the angels remind him that he is in fact worthy, offering him God's forgiveness. That's the bit with the fiery coal to Isaiah's mouth. I don't know why they use fiery coal. We can be confused by that together or perhaps you know and can share it with me—but know that it results in Isaiah receiving forgiveness and being reminded of God's love for him. This is important because when God asks who is going to do God's work, Isaiah has the confidence and the strength to say, “Here am I, God!” Send me! I can do it!”

To put it another way, at a time when Isaiah's world was disrupted, he is reminded of the goodness of God. He is reminded of God's love for him and because of this he is able to eagerly respond to God's call to serve. It sounds a little weird the first few times you read it, but it's in there. I love this story.

For me, this story is the story of what happens when we come to church each week. It sums up and explains everything I think that occurs when we gather together for worship. You see, when we arrive here on Sunday morning at 8:30am/10:30am, we bring everything that we have done and seen in the past week. We bring all the stress and all the ways we messed up or let someone down or disappointed ourselves. We bring the pain we are carrying. We bring the stories we have read in the news—the disasters, wars, accidents, and violence—with us. We bring it all.

And then, together, we create something different. Through our songs, prayers and stories, we are reminded that the pain and suffering that we see in the world or we experience in our lives is not all that there is. We are reminded that we are a part of something that is greater than the bad things that happen. We are reminded that there is still good in the world and there is still hope for us. We are reminded that the goodness and the hope is God.

Worship is our vision of God. It may look different than Isaiah's, but when we are in worship we are doing something very similar to what he experienced. We sing of God's greatness and wonder. Like the angels with six wings we sing out, "Holy, holy, holy! God's glory surrounds us!" We speak prayers that tell us of all the good that God has created. We create silence and peace when all we have known before is chaos and noise. We name the ways we have failed and then we remind each other that we are loved and forgiven and that nothing can separate us from God. We don't kiss lumps of fiery coal, but instead we find forgiveness in confession and communion. We are reminded that we are not alone.

The vision that we create during worship is one that is meant to renew us. It is meant to give us strength to face whatever is waiting for us when we leave this sanctuary. It is designed so that we will feel empowered to start again, a little more hopeful, a little more grounded, and a little more aware of God's presence in our lives.

Finally, at the end of worship, at the closing of our own vision of God and God's glory, we reach the same conclusion that Isaiah did. We call it the benediction. The sending. Every single week we are told to go out in the world, to serve, to do good, to help God's people. And we do. Over and over again. We go our separate ways and we minister to our neighbors, we care for our families and friends, we work hard to leave a positive mark in the world.

Isaiah heard God's question, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" and Isaiah said, "Here am I! Send me!" Every week, when we come to this place, we have the opportunity to answer that question for ourselves. We might come here alone, but when we leave we do so knowing we have the support of a whole community encouraging us. We might come here feeling broken, but when we leave we do so feeling a little more whole. We might come here wondering if there could possibly be a God when there are so many bad things that happen in the world, but when we leave we do so knowing that God is the source of all that is good and right and well with the world. So we say, each of us in our own way and with our own words, "Here I am, God! Send me!"