

A Sermon for DaySpring

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“Saying Yes”

The fifth in a series entitled, A Compelling Faith

Isaiah 6; I Corinthians 15; and Luke 5

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During this season after Epiphany, I've been preaching a series of sermons entitled, A Compelling Faith. I've been talking to you about that and if you have an interest in talking back at me, come to Sunday School next week. We're going to talk together about these ideas.

I began several weeks back by saying the world has changed and that this is an opportunity for us as people of faith. It's a new time... this postmodern, pluralistic time in which we find ourselves... And, like folks of faith throughout history, we're invited to take the gospel and embrace our time.

Faith isn't a static thing... and the Spirit is blowing where it will... And we should have a finger in the air so we can follow. That's what Christians do... that's who we are.

Which takes us to these three we just read about... Isaiah, Peter, and Paul. Definitely a prophetic/apostolic who's who, huh? All in the Flannel Graph Hall of Fame.

They all three follow but not without first getting a special glimpse of God... A big time Epiphany. All three find themselves face to face with holiness but they were all in very different places.

Isaiah... was in the temple in the year King Uzziah dies... Uzziah's likely a relative of Isaiah's. Probably... they were close... so this isn't just a passing reference so we'll know what year it is but maybe it's more of a glimpse into Isaiah's heart.

He's in the temple because the king is dead. And Uzziah was not only a good king... a Camelot kind of King, Uzziah was Isaiah's friend, I'm thinking. So, in the year King Uzziah dies, Isaiah is grieving.

He's taken his grief to the altar as people sometimes do. The world is upside down when Yahweh's **“train fills the temple.”** Isaiah isn't sure of anything anymore, when God shows up with such a powerful Epiphany.

Paul, of course, was in a very different situation. He's sure of everything. Remember Paul on the road to Damascus... headed there to arrest Christians. Paul isn't filled up with grief, he's filled up with self-righteousness. His persecuting career is in full swing... when God reveals.

And Peter???? He's just doing the same ole' same ole' down at the docks. Pulling the nets in like he's done everyday for as long as he can remember.

Half asleep.

One hand over the next.

Unconscious really...

Peter's bored stiff when Jesus chooses to cast him a miracle.

The point... I guess, that the Lectionary makes by putting these stories side by side is... who knows when and where God might show up. Not that our searching or seeking isn't

helpful... Just that God is out there and when God breaks in here there's no predicting or manipulating it. No choosing it.

In the temple empty with grief,
on the road to kill someone,
at the dock after a frustrating night's work...
God who is beyond breaks in... and a glimpse is given.

As different as these three situations are... what follows with Peter, Paul, and Isaiah is very much alike. They're all moments where the word, **awe** applies. This is, shut-your-mouth, drop-you-to-your-knees awareness. They're all afraid. The Great I Am shows up and they're shaking.

We're pretty removed from a moment like this one. We're removed from awe, aren't we. Why is that?

Some of it is that we've put these stories on the flannel graph one to many times and we've flattened them out. They're thin... talked over too much. They're the stuff of Sunday School but not life.

Of course, it's not just a Sunday School problem. It's the world we live in... so predictable... so manageable... and mechanical. There's no magic in modernity, is there. We can't imagine anything, not even the infinite, knocking us to our knees.

It's church, it's the world... that makes awe impossible. But it's also us. We can't picture a God beyond us. We're so egocentric that we create gods in our own image... small and powerless... God is like us only older and with a beard.

There's a reason most of us grew up singing, "**My Best Friend is Jesus**" and not "**Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise**"

Clement of Alexandria once wrote, "**Most people are enclosed in their mortal bodies like a snail in its shell, curled up in their obsessions after the manner of hedgehogs. They form their notion of God taking themselves for a model.**" Little people, little God. Uncompelled people because their God is un compelling.

The result is... Nothing is beyond us, nothing amazes us. It's like the awe button has been broken and it can't be pushed and so we can't really feel awe... not even about God.

Gregory of Nazianzen was a poetic theologian in the early church (and back then it seems you had to be both.) There seemed to be less sterile thinking about the Divine. They knew it had to be artistic and beautiful and awe inspiring to be true.

Gregory wrote these words...

*O thou who art beyond all,
How canst thou be called by another name?
What hymn can sing of thee?
No name describes thee.
What mind can grasp thee?
No intellect conceives thee.
Thou only art inexpressible;
All that is spoken comes forth from thee.
Thou only art unknowable;
All that is thought comes forth from thee.
All creatures praise thee,
Those that speak and those that are dumb.
All creatures praise thee,*

*All creatures bow down before thee,
 Those that can think and those that have no power of thought.
 The universal longing, the groaning of creation tends towards thee.
 Everything that exists prays to thee
 And to thee every creature that can read thy universe
 sends up a hymn of silence.
 In thee alone all things dwell.
 Wit a single impulse all things find their goal in thee.
 Thou are the purpose of every creature.
 thou art unique.
 Thou art each one and art not any.
 thou art not a single creature nor art thou the sum of creatures;
 All names are thine; how shall I address thee,
 Who alone cannot be named?
 Have mercy, O thou, the Beyond All;
 How canst thou be called by any other name?
 (The Roots of Christian Mysticism, Clement, 28)*

We need a faith that fosters a little amazement in our lives... and some wonder... and some awe. Which means that we have to become more aware of how amazing and how wonderful and how awesome the world really is. That life is so beautifully complex and layered with meaning. And that this life is a reflection of an imprint of the God we claim to be seeking. It's the divine DNA that makes a sunrise or a cell split... or a romance or a galaxy.

God is so beyond us. God is transcendent but God transcends his own transcendence... and for our sakes, has come to us. And if that doesn't move us to our knees and to some humility before what is so sacred... we're no where near getting it.

“Woe is me... I'm so unclean...”

“Go away from me... I'm sinful...”

“I do not deserve... I am the least...”

These are the kinds of responses we make as we begin to see clearly who God is. These are our initial instincts in the face of an Epiphany.

And though we've not been in a smoky sanctuary or on Damascus Roads or even had a miracle catch, most of us know some of what that's like to feel the urge to say, **“Woe is me.”** When you live long enough to look into your own heart and when you can be honest about the darkness there.

It takes some living to know how mixed are our motives...

How futile our attempts to change that...

We see brokenness and finiteness and weakness.

“The good I want to do I just can't do... go away from me.”

But God doesn't... That's the good news, God doesn't. Everyone is always prone to shrink in fear and God is forever saying, **“Fear not.”** It's one of the most often used phrases in scripture... 350 times, **“Don't be afraid.”** It's what Jesus says to Peter on the dock. **“Don't be afraid of me... get up and go with me and let's go rescue some folks.”**

And Peter said, **“Yes.”**

As did Paul...

and Isaiah

and lots of you, **“Here am I, send me.”**

The people who say yes to God are the ones who've seen how beautiful God is and how wonderful the world is... and how sacred life is. But they are also folks who see themselves and get past thinking their limitations are limitations for God. **“Fishers of men... rescuers of humanity... that's pretty great.”**

So, seeing how great God is and how acceptable you are, you can leave your fears behind... or your nets... or your self-righteousness... even your unclean lips and your guilt, Isaiah. Because God is so good and the world is in such need... you can get up, leave whatever it is you need to leave and go. None of us ever follow Jesus without leaving something behind, you know.

Be patient with yourself, though... Conviction about that takes time. We tend to take hold of Christ with one hand and with the other drag our stuff.

Here's a hint for you... It's not the weakness but you're hatred of it that needs to be let go of. It's not your wound but your hiding of it... Not even your sin, so much, as it is your condemnation of it.

Let it all go to God and let Christ take you into a larger world and a larger truth... You just can't go there dragging the old stuff... old fears... old worldviews... archaic, self-defeating self-images.

You can't say **“yes”** and **“woe is me”** all at the same time. You can't hang on to your nets and to this Christ who is inviting you out beyond the docks you're so familiar with. Peter started on the shores of Galilee, a man of serious unclean lips, if you know what I mean. He started in Galilee, nets in hand... but he wound up in Rome... keys in hand, on top of the Vatican. He proclaim God's word with those same lips.

Did you know that Lauryn Pitts is going to Africa to help teach woman health care and care for some orphans with aids? That's a long way from Alabama, Lauryn. People see God and themselves and the world all the time. And they say yes.

Did you know Polly Barnes has left her home, gone back to school to be a minister after a long career in teaching? People see God and themselves and the world all the time... and say yes.

Did you know Susan Josephs gets up everyday and puts a smile on her face to go help make Waco High a good place for students to learn? People see God and the world's need... and say yes everyday.

Did you know that Doug Rogers washes dishes every Thursday at the Gospel Café? A single parent squeezing hungry people into his schedule. They say yes.

Did you know Beth McIntire leads a support group for inner city women? Another yes.

Did you know that Betty Devers listens to hurting hearts... And that Charlie Olson is trying to make a difference in Waco through the school board?

And that Regina Easley-Young holds the hands of the dying everyday? And that Katy Stokes has new DaySpringers over for tea... and that Jan Wright has worked for years with handicapped kids... and that Gene Evans helps poor people buy homes... and Lane Collins mows the church lawn so it'll be beautiful for you to see and enjoy.

People say, **“here am I send me.”** And I think they say it because God has broken through to them... so wonderful and amazing... They see how sacred things are and including their lives. They also see a world. Seeing anything helps us see everything.

I know how it will happen for you... A vision in a temple somewhere or some signal in the ordinariness of your life. But I believe in a God who comes to us and who calls to us. Keep looking and listening... why don't you. And when He calls, let go... say, **“Yes.”** You'll so be glad you did.