



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST November 9, 2014

“Here Am I! Send Me.”

(Isaiah 6:8-9a)

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“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’” (Isaiah 6:8-9a).

Collect of the Day

Lord God, heavenly Father, send forth Your Son to lead home His bride, the Church, that with all the company of the redeemed we may finally enter into His eternal wedding feast; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Last week I saw the movie “Fury”. Set in April of 1945, it’s a movie about a single M4 Sherman tank and its five-man crew led by the tank commander played by Brad Pitt. It’s not a movie for everyone. The violence is graphic and haunting. The men are at once battle hardened, but also broken. It’s a grueling film. But it’s also a deeply religious film. The crew is in danger of death, so they’re thinking a lot about God and their souls. They’re never very far from their Christian faith, even though they vacillate between being heroes and villains.

It’s also a movie about vocation, about doing what we’ve been called to do no matter how undesirable or fearful a thing it is. The American Sherman tanks at the time were hopelessly outgunned by the new German Tiger Tank and the Tiger’s armor was nearly impervious to the Sherman’s cannons. In one scene, they encounter a German Tiger Panzer. One of the Americans says, “Let’s get out of here” to which the tank commander says, the way I see it “he’s our problem.”

Later, they are sent to secure a crucial intersection. Their tank has been disabled, and the German troops marching their way are vastly superior. The odds are nearly hopeless. There is a way out, and the survival instinct is a strong one. Yet they choose to stay though it means almost certain death.

As they’re waiting, one of the men quotes Isaiah 6, “Then 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!’” The other crewmen really think about it, even repeat it to themselves, “Send me.” It’s not just prophets

who are called by God. Soldiers have a calling, a vocation given them by God to protect their nation . . . to put down evil.

In the Old Testament lesson, Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” “Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’” Isaiah makes it sound so easy. Doesn’t he want to at least see the job description before signing on the dotted line? Doesn’t Isaiah want to know the risks? Has he no questions, no concerns?

It seems to me, Moses’ response to the call of God is much more realistic. “Who am I” he asks, “that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Ex. 3:11). Then again a few verses later, “But they will not believe me or listen to me. They will say, “The LORD did not appear to you” (4:1). And then in another few verses, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent. . . I am slow of speech.” And then yet one more time, a fourth time, in verse 13, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” That sounds realistic. That sounds familiar. That sounds like how you and I would process being asked to take on more responsibility. What sounds unfamiliar and unrealistic is Isaiah’s instant and unconditional response. “Here am I! Send me.”

I read this last week an article from the Harvard Business Review entitled, “Who’s Got the Monkey?” It’s an article meant to help managers with time management and the distribution of responsibility. The general idea is that the manager always needs to know who has the monkey on his back, who has the responsibility to take a project to the next step. The manager needs to know this because people are always trying to put the monkey on someone else’s back. It’s part of our nature. It almost seems part of the Autonomic Nervous System like breathing or sweating. It happens below the level of consciousness. We automatically try to put the monkey on someone else’s shoulders without really even thinking about it.

Maybe you have heard the still small voice of God calling you to a task, a job, a project. Maybe you see a need here at church, or within the community, and you know

those who are trying to address the need are struggling, either for lack of manpower or skills. And you know you could help . . . but it's always easier to not step forward and say, "Here am I! Send me."

Or maybe someone has taken the initiative and asked you, "Would you consider serving in this way?" If you happen to be out there in the community you say, "I'll think about it and get back to you." And if you're in here, you say, "I'll pray about it, and get back to you." But mostly you've already made your decision and just want to make sure you give the *appearance* of seriously considering it before you call back and say, "Thanks, but not at this time."

Why are we so reluctant to say "Here am I. Send me!?" First, I think sometimes we forget that it is God who is calling us to greater responsibility, calling us to be more than what we are. God's extraordinary way of doing this is through a burning bush. That happened once with Moses. God's ordinary way of calling a person is through other people. We can't say yes to everyone, but we also shouldn't say no to everyone. He's given you time and skills and expects you to put them to good use. Paul writes in Romans, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, **let us use them.**"

Second, like Moses, we assume there must be someone better suited for the job than we are, with better skills. Truth be told, there probably is. But God is not calling that other person to do it. He's calling you and apparently thinks you do have the skills.

Pastor David Mulder with whom I worked for a few years once ranted, "Some people are so humble that they're useless." The point? You have gifts and training and experiences that those sitting around you do not. God wants to use those for his purposes, not just within these walls but also out there in the community. Galatians 6:5, "Each one should carry his own load."

Third, I think sometimes we assume happiness and fulfillment is not having to do anything, not having to serve anyone. That's a lie from the father of lies. Rich,

meaningful, abundant life is not found in sloth and leisure. It's found in making the world a better place. Jesus said "It is more blessed [more satisfying] to give than to receive."

Fourth, it's a fearful thing to accept more responsibility. We have many questions about what we can expect, and no one has a crystal ball that can answer them. Sure, a lot that can go wrong, but God is not going to leave you in the lurch. Deuteronomy 31, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (v. 6).

Isaiah didn't say, "Here am I. Send me" because he thought he was the best possible person for the job. He said, "Send me" because he trusted the Lord would also equip and help those he sends. And the Lord does that in very real ways. For example, most of us worry about saying the right things, right? Way back in Exodus 4, the LORD told Moses, "I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (v. 12). Later in his career Isaiah acknowledged that's how it worked for him. "The Lord gave me an instructed tongue" (Is. 50:4).

When God called Jeremiah, he also resisted saying, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, I don't know how to speak; I am only a child." But the Lord said to me, "Don't say [that]" Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched his mouth and said, "Now I have put my words in your mouth." In Matthew 10, Jesus said, "Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say."

This isn't a promise of infallibility. This isn't a promise you will speak only the perfect truth with precision. But it is a promise the Lord will help you along the way.

"Here am I. Send me." Tuesday is Veteran's Day. There are a number of examples of selfless service from veterans within our congregation. Let me point to just one: Will Wegner. He died three years ago. At the age of 17 he basically stepped before a Marine recruiter and said, "Here am I. Send me!" After a few short months of training, his company was packed onto a transport ship. They were going to a small island with an odd and unfamiliar name: Iwo

Jima . . . Japanese soil, only 150 miles away from Tokyo. There was a simple runway on the island, and that's what made it such prime real estate. The allies wanted it badly because it was so conveniently close to the main island of Japan, and that's why the Japanese were just as desperate to keep it. Will's company was trying to take that runway, and one of the most forward Marines was hit by a Japanese sniper. Someone needed to pull that man back to safety, but everyone knew the sniper was zeroed in and waiting for a Marine to do just that. Once again, Will stepped up and essentially said, "Here am I. Send me." He made a dash for the injured fellow, and sure enough, Will was also shot through the base of the neck. He spent the next weeks in a field hospital (a tent) on the beach of the island.

Meanwhile, his company continued to fight for the runway. At the time, the marines liked to divide into groups of three, a way of accounting for one another. The two with whom Will would have been were both killed in a fox hole by a single Japanese hand grenade. Had Will not been injured, he would have been in that fox hole. People liked to tell Will he was lucky. He told them, "Luck had nothing to do with it. God saved my life."

"Here am I. Send me." There is another who said the very same thing: God's Son Jesus. Facing not just Pharaoh, not just a German panzer or a Japanese sniper, Jesus was volunteering to take on our great enemy, the devil, together with the sin of the world. Facing certain death himself, he did not shrink from that responsibility, that calling, that vocation, but "endured the cross scorning its shame." He made our enemies his problem. He took ownership of our sin and our death. The monkey was on his back alone. Our desperate dilemma became his alone to fix. And he did. His blood was and is sufficient. He has written our names into the Lamb's book of life. We stand forgiven and redeemed because Jesus said, "Here am I. Send me!"

This one who created and redeemed you has also called you and has work for you to do, unique work for which he has uniquely equipped you. Ephesians 2 says, "We

are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand” (v. 10). So the question is not, “How can I get out of this?” The question is, “How can I best use the gifts he has given me to “thank and praise him, serve and obey him.”

Isaiah said, “Here am I. Send me!” In essence, many veterans have also said those words. And now it’s our time. “Here am I. Send me!” Amen.

I’d like to close with a favorite prayer. It was written by Eric Milner-White, who was at one time the Dean of King’s College in Cambridge. He was a chaplain during WW I, and wrote this prayer in the early days of WWII. It addresses the fears soldiers may have, and the fears we may have whenever taking on a new responsibility or entering a new chapter of life. Please find the prayer on the back of the bullet in bold print:

“Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.” (*Evening Prayer*, p. 22, HS 98)

