



“Saying Yes to God”

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

a sermon by the Rev. Anna von Winckler

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

Today is Trinity Sunday and the sermon was intended to go with that theme, but when news came out a couple of days ago of the deaths of a young missionary couple in Haiti, Davy and Natalie Lloyd, I felt compelled to change the focus of this sermon on the Isaiah passage, on what God is calling us to do. Davy was just 22 years old and his wife was 21.

For any of you who haven't been following the story, the father of this young man, started an orphanage in Haiti in 2000. Davy grew up in Haiti. Creole was his first language. His wife was the daughter of a US Congressman from Missouri. The father said in an interview that he had offered them to travel back to the States just a week before they were killed, that is when the parents of Davy left for the US, but the young couple decided to stay behind.

The possibility of death has always been a part of mission work. Whether it is from going into places of violence or war overseas or seeking justice and freedom for those who have none within one's own country, as was the case for the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

So why do people do that? Put themselves in dangerous situations for people they don't know? Who they may never get to know by name? It is to a calling from God that they are responding in faithfulness and love. Yes, love, even for people they don't know by name.

In our passage from Isaiah, our prophet finds himself in a divine encounter with the Lord in the temple. His people have been unfaithful. They have been turning away from God. Here in the temple, Isaiah sees the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple. Seraphim surround God, calling out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” In this moment of worship, Isaiah is overwhelmed by the presence of God and his own unworthiness. He cries out, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.”

But God does not leave Isaiah in his despair. A seraphim takes a live coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips, cleansing him and preparing him for his calling as a prophet. And then God speaks, saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Isaiah responds with courage and faith, saying, "Here am I. Send me!"

There are two things I would like us to think about this morning. The first is what it means to worship God; what it is that is supposed to happen when we are in worship. This passage reminds us that our worship should be a reflection of the holiness and glory of God. It should be a time of encountering the presence of God, of acknowledging our own sinfulness and need for cleansing, and of responding to God's call with faith and obedience. Worship is not just a time of singing songs and listening to a sermon, but a sacred moment of communion with the Almighty.

In worship, we should hear the voice of God speaking to us *through* the music, the prayers, the liturgy, and the sermon. It is a time when we are called to *listen*, to *be still*, and to *open our hearts* to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is a time when we are *challenged* to examine our lives, to *repent* of our sins, and to *commit* ourselves to living out our faith in the world.

But worship is not just a personal experience. It is a communal act of praise and thanksgiving, of confession and forgiveness, of intercession and petition. Not all denominations have a communal prayer of confession, but I believe this is an essential part of the service; for as we see throughout the scriptures, the Israelites, the Jews, sin repeatedly as a people - and we continue to do that as well as Christians. Worship is supposed to be a time when the community seeks out unity in the Spirit and direction as a people.

And just as Isaiah was called to prophetic ministry after his encounter with God in the temple, so too are we called to live out our faith in the world. We are called to speak truth to power, to fight against injustice, and to stand up for the marginalized and oppressed. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a broken and hurting world.

But saying yes to God is not always easy. It can be a perilous journey, fraught with challenges and obstacles. Isaiah faced opposition and rejection as he proclaimed the word of the Lord to a rebellious and stubborn people. He saw the land laid waste and the people taken into exile. But he remained faithful to his calling, trusting in the sovereignty and goodness of God. He kept preaching the Word of God, the truth, even though the people would not listen. He kept at it despite what was happening both to him and around him, as he was rejected for his words.

In our own lives, saying yes to God may require the same commitment and devotion. It may require us to step out of our comfort zones, to confront our fears and insecurities, and to stand up for what is right and just. It may require us to risk our reputation, our relationships, and even our lives for the sake of the gospel. But we can take courage in the knowledge that God is with us, guiding and empowering us every step of the way.

I wanted to talk about this issue of service and call now not just because of what happened in Haiti. I'm sure none of you are hearing a call from God to go to Haiti to minister in a nation that is currently existing in a state of lawlessness and violence, but I felt compelled to preach on this today not just because of what happened in Haiti, but for what happened last weekend that ties into this idea of call and serving God, and that is Scott Wylie's wedding. I hope he doesn't mind me sharing this, and I don't think he would, but

at the reception we had a chance to talk one on one, and with eyes glistening with tears of joy, he shared how much it meant to him, as a gay man, to be able to be married in his own church, surrounded by not only his family and friends, but by his church family, who mean so much to him; something that wouldn't have been possible not that long ago and that some in our society would like to see changed back to being illegal; and, who would like to see the LGBTQ community go back into the closet. We cannot let that happen. We need to show our love and our support by actively speaking out and championing the cause to make sure that the civil liberties so hard won continue to be maintained in our country, because that is what Jesus would be doing if he were walking the earth today. Standing up to the authorities, both religious and secular, who would have the rights of women, of the LGBTQ people, of black and brown people taken away, marginalized again, suppressed again, hidden away again. And that is what Christ, our Savior would want us to continue to do in his name.

This is what we need to do in this moment of history in our country, because it is a real concern as there are some that adhere to a Christian Nationalism, a white supremacy, that would look to turn back time to when women were barefoot and pregnant and the LGBTQ community seemingly didn't exist. And so much of this is wrapped around the idolatry of one man.

Recently, a conservative preacher from North Carolina stood up and preached to his congregation against this idolatry of the former president. He preached against the bible being sold that put the constitution with the scriptures. He reminded his congregation that "the Gospel is not an American Gospel. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ." He went on to say, "You can get mad at me, but if you glory in (that) then you do not devote yourself to prayer and God."

One commentator said that too many pastors are scared to preach things like this, to preach against Christian Nationalism and all the harm it is doing to the country; scared to speak against the politicians who seek to take away civil liberties because they fear backlash - whether that be fear of being fired or fear of putting their and their families' safety at risk. But the commentator went on to say that preachers are also not preaching to encourage their congregations to become civilly engaged to ensure that the hard fought liberties that have been gained for women, for the LGBTQ community, for the black and brown communities are not stripped. Jesus was civilly engaged and we need to be as well.

The perils of saying yes to God are real. Anything can happen - to us, to our families and loved ones, but the rewards are even greater than the danger. Just as Isaiah's prophetic ministry bore fruit in due time, so too will our obedience to God's call. We may not always see the results of our faithfulness in this lifetime, but we can trust that God is working all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

As we reflect on the example of Isaiah and his willingness to say yes, let us consider the tender shoot of hope that springs forth from the ashes of despair. Let us be inspired by the courage, the sacrifice, and the unwavering commitment to justice and righteousness that has come about because there were people before us that said yes when they heard God's call.

In a time when our country is divided and our world is in turmoil, may we be the voice of truth and love in the midst of chaos and confusion. May we be the hands and feet of Jesus, reaching out in compassion and mercy to those in need. And may we be the light of hope in a dark and broken world, shining brightly with the love of Christ. And always standing up to those authority figures, religious or secular, who choose to do harm instead of good.

So when God asks, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" may we respond with boldness and faith, saying, "Here am I. Send me!" Amen.

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