

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, August 28, 2016**  
**Rev. Andrew Reid**  
**Isaiah 6:1-8**  
**Sent**

There is something wonderful about the almost poetic words of Isaiah 6, something mysterious, mystical, almost magical. They tell how Isaiah experienced his call to prophethood. Interestingly they don't come as the opening words of the book of Isaiah, the way the call to Jeremiah that we read last Sunday comes right at the start of the book of Jeremiah, right at the start of his life in fact, before he was even born – 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you ...' Jeremiah 1:5.

No, God's call to Isaiah comes six chapters into the book that bears his name, and only after Isaiah has given us a series of truly glorious prophetic statements. Statements like: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool Isaiah 1:18.

The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills ... they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more Isaiah 2:2,4.

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard Isaiah 5:1.

Then comes the account of his call to serve God - to go for us Isaiah 6:8. And a wonderfully poetic, mysterious, mystical account it is. It starts with Isaiah standing in the Temple, there presumably to worship and to pray.

Was he feeling overwhelmed by his grief over the death of the king, and was he fearful for what the political future would be for his people? Was he intoxicated by the smell of the smoke of the lamps and the burnt offerings? Was he overawed by the magnificence of the architecture and the decoration? Was he carried away by the sound of voices lifted in praise and prayer?

Maybe all of these, maybe none of these, but whatever brought it on, suddenly the scene shifts, and it is as if he finds himself standing not in a terrestrial Temple, but in the courts of heaven itself.

The statues of the winged creatures that adorned the Temple come alive, transformed into six-winged seraphs. The smoke swirling around becomes the robe of the LORD. The voices of the worshippers become the voice of the seraphs, singing the great hymn of praise,

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

His grief and his fear for what the future will hold for his people become a sense of inadequacy, of unworthiness, both personal unworthiness and the unworthiness of his people, something that he has warned them about before in his prophetic preaching.

But then all that is swept away by a sense of forgiveness and restoration and worth as his guilt departs and his sin is blotted out.

No wonder then that when he heard the challenge ring out – ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ – he should step forward and say, ‘Here am I; send me!’

The unexpected breaking in of God's realm into the realm of this world. The awesome holiness of God. The smallness and inadequacy of humankind in the face of the awesome holiness of God. The searing, forgiving, empowering touch of God. The irresistibly compelling call of God. And his voice calling out in response: ‘Here am I; send me!’

Who among us would not do the same after an experience like that???

In a few minutes we will commission our Malawi mission team as they prepare to set off tomorrow for their great adventure. This is something to which they have all felt God calling them to do. It is something which other people, including many of you, and people in other congregations, and people in organisations that are not associated with any congregation, have felt God calling them to support.

They have planned and prepared and packed. They have worked and knitted and sewn. They have scoured the shops and their shelves for supplies. They have raised funds and appealed for donations. They have begged, borrowed and – well, let's just say they have begged and borrowed. Their suitcases are packed, and tomorrow they head off for Pearson airport, then Heathrow airport, London, England; on to Johannesburg, South Africa; finally arriving in Blantyre, Malawi, on Wednesday afternoon.

There they will work with ministers and congregations in churches in Chuluchosema and Chipagala. They will provide eye assessments for up to 2,000 people. They will work with young people and adults and children. They will distribute supplies. They will worship and preach and teach. And if Cathy has anything to do with it, I have absolutely no doubt that there will be a bit of dancing as well.

This is something which they have all felt God calling them to do. But not one of them has had an experience like Isaiah's, of seeing the LORD high and lifted up and his robe filling the Temple. At least, if they have had an experience like that, they haven't told me about it.

Rather, it seems to me their sense of being called has much more to do with the way Jesus calls all of us to serve him.

It's the same quiet way that Jesus called people like Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John and Matthew: with the simple, quiet but utterly life-changing words, 'Follow me.' Or the way Jesus spoke about caring for the least of those who are his sisters and brothers. Or the way Jesus left his followers with the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

A great calling to a huge task. But there is no greater calling for people of faith than the call to share, with the world and with God, the greatness and the holiness of God, and the tenderness and the love of God that we have experienced in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

I don't know about you, but I am more proud than I can say to honour our mission team and to send them on their way with our love and our blessings, as they live out God's call to all of us to follow Christ, worship God and serve others.