

## **Bearing Witness**

Romans 8: 12-17

Isaiah 6:1-8

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### *Romans 8: 12-17*

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### *Isaiah 6:1-8*

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” 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!”

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When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, he expected people to say “Ahoy!” when they answered the phone. That was a little bit too nautical for most people, though, and it never really caught on. Soon after that, it was Thomas Edison who suggested the word “hello”.<sup>i</sup>

And so we could assume that everyone around the world answers the phone by saying “hello” in their own language, but that’s not the case at all. Most other countries have different ways of answering.

Russians will pick up the phone and say, “I’m listening.”

The French will say, “Who is on the phone?”

Italians will say, “Ready!”

The Spanish will say, “Speak!”

Germans will answer the phone by giving their last name.

The Portuguese will say, “I’m here.”

Just as there are different ways of answering the phone, there are also different ways to answer a call from God.

Isaiah, an 8<sup>th</sup> century BC descendant of the royal Davidic dynasty, son of a prophet and the nephew of a king, was uniquely positioned to serve as an effective prophet of God. He would

certainly not be intimidated by royalty and he was able to extend rebuke when necessary<sup>ii</sup>. His prophecies for the Israel he loved spoke of who God was for the people, the challenges to trust God and the challenges of God through the suffering servant, the judgement because of covenant rebellion and ultimately the hope of new creation.

In time, he would be considered the “prince of the prophets” because his writings were one of the most favored. It is from Isaiah that we know that the Lord would give a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”<sup>iii</sup> And we hear the good news, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”<sup>iv</sup>

At important, critical, times in his life and ministry, Jesus quoted Isaiah. It was in his first sermon at his hometown synagogue, when Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah as he came to fulfill the prophet’s words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>v</sup>

When Jesus confronted Jewish rulers who opposed him, he reminded them of Isaiah’s stern rebuke, “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ““These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.””<sup>vi</sup>

When Jesus flipped the tables of the moneychangers and cleansed the temple, he condemned their actions with Isaiah’s words, ‘It is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer”; but you have made it a den of robbers.””<sup>vii</sup>

Yet for all that Isaiah became, all that his words and faith meant and continue to mean in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Isaiah’s beginnings were reluctant, confessional, humble and self-critical. In spite of his place in religious and secular society, he understood himself to be a sinful man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips. The grand seraphs calling out the trinitarian praise “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory,” emphasizing God’s wonder, majesty and sovereignty did not shake Isaiah’s denial of his worthiness of God’s call.

God’s grace and forgiveness, in the shape of seraph bearing a live coal from the altar to touch Isaiah’s lips, burned away his sin, his guilt, and kindled the awakening of his call.

Once reticent and reluctant, Isaiah could now hear God. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And he could freely, eagerly, say “Here am I; send me!”

Isaiah was sent into a tumultuous time and world to be a prophet, to bear witness to what was happening, what would happen, and God’s will. He was immersed in this. Called by God to be in the midst of all that was happening to be a voice of hope and of rebuke, he was sent to bear witness to God’s challenge and compassion.

A calling by God—to a major prophet or to anyone—is an invitation to boldly respond, “Here am I; send me,” in ways that stand with, that walk alongside, that participate and advocate in the deep work and experiences. We are sent out not as sideline observers, not as quiet bystanders, but to bear witness to God’s challenge and compassion, to be immersed in the relationship, in the situation.

Some are eager to answer God’s call, others are apprehensive, doubtful, some respond quickly, others need time, until there is a divine coal that burns away hesitation and uncertainty to kindle and awaken God’s calling and purpose.

Paul, who had his own unique calling<sup>viii</sup> from being a notorious persecutor of Christians to becoming one of the most influential people in Christianity, teaches us that by our adoption into the triune God, into Abba Father, into being joint heirs of suffering and glory with Christ, into the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, we too can respond to the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us,” by saying, “Here am I; send me!”

Because when we claim this identity, we discover that we belong to God, we are beloved children brought into the family on purpose.

This is the mystery of God we celebrate today: God over and above us, God for and with us, God in and among us, One God, the intimate, tender Abba, Jesus Christ, the God who in the waters of baptism makes us his own, who meets us at table to give us the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation, the Spirit who is in us and among us, using us to share the good news of love and purpose for us all, as we bear witness.

When have you heard God calling you, and how did you say, “Here I am, send me.’  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://historyfacts.com/science-industry/fact/alexander-graham-bell-proposed-using-ahoy-to-answer-the-phone/>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/4333606/jewish/Who-Was-Isaiah.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4333606/jewish/Who-Was-Isaiah.)

<sup>iii</sup> Isaiah 7:14

<sup>iv</sup> Isaiah 9:6

<sup>v</sup> Isaiah 61: 1-2, Luke 4:18-19

<sup>vi</sup> Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:7-9

<sup>vii</sup> Isaiah 56:7, Luke 19:46

<sup>viii</sup> Acts 9