Trinity

May 30, 2021

Isaiah 6:1-8

One of my favorite movies is *Casablanca*. I love the moment when Ingrid Bergman walks into Rick’s Café and looks around, taking everything in.

And then she pauses by the piano and says, “Play it once, Sam, for old time’s sake. Play ‘As Time Goes By’.”

That one moment sparks the rest of the movie. Such a seemingly unimportant request is a pivot point in the lives of Ilsa, Rick, Sam, Victor, and Louis. Their lives are forever changed in that instant.

We all have pivot points in our lives, moments that might seem like nothing important at first, but lead us to life-altering experiences and decisions.

It is our response to them that makes all the difference.

All of the prophets had a pivot point. When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, said that Moses should go back to Egypt and talk to Pharaoh on behalf of God’s people, Moses wasn’t exactly in a hurry to agree. “What if they don’t believe me or think you sent me,” he asks. “I’m not very eloquent. I’m slow of speech and tongue. Please send someone else.”

Jeremiah argued that he was too young and inexperienced. Jonah simply ran in the opposite direction, trying to get as far away from Nineveh as he could.

But when Isaiah had his vision of the Lord sitting on a throne, surrounded by seraphs, he didn’t make any excuses, but acknowledged his unworthiness, and the unworthiness of his people.

After the seraph touches a hot coal to Isaiah’s lips and declares that Isaiah’s guilt has departed him, God speaks. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

And Isaiah immediately, unhesitatingly, responds, “Here I am! Send me!”

God sends Isaiah out on a mission that is, quite honestly, not all that great. Immediately after Isaiah volunteers, God tells him that he’s not going to be successful. The people will be hesitant to listen to him. They won’t understand what he’s saying. They won’t do the things they need to do to avoid the punishment that’s about to befall them.

They have wandered from God, wandered from the path of obedience, and there are consequences. Judah will be defeated. The peoples will be exiled. The land will lay desolate.

And yet, in the mere act of God appearing to Isaiah lies a glimmer of hope. Because the people knew that God was slow to anger, merciful, and abounding in steadfast love.

The God of Isaiah’s vision, seated on a throne and attended by seraphs, is God in all God’s glory, transcendent and eternal. This is the God who created the universe, the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebecca. The God who blessed Jacob so that Jacob could be in a position to help his brothers during the famine. The God who parted the Red Sea and fed the Israelites with manna and quail.

This is a God who does not abandon promises.

This is God who does not give up on covenants, even when the Israelites stray.

This is the God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. God did this not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through his Son.

However this God comes to us — whether in a still, small voice, or in a vision, or with a burning bush — we have to choose how to respond. Will we, like Moses or Jeremiah, look for excuses? Will we, like Jonah, try to avoid God’s call?

Or will we, like Isaiah, say, “Here I am, send me,” before knowing what God is even asking of us?

In his nighttime meeting with Jesus, Nicodemus had a pivot moment. And, while he doesn’t seem to come out of it with a deeper understanding or appreciation for who Jesus is or what Jesus was doing, we know that a seed was planted.

Because, a few chapters later, we hear about him defending Jesus before the Sanhedrin, a risky move. It could have threatened his own comfortable place in society, his place in the Jewish leadership.

Yet that seed had been planted and Nicodemus felt called to speak up.

And when Jesus dies, Nicodemus was there, along with Joseph of Arimathea, to tend to Jesus’ body.

For Isaiah, the pivot moment led to an immediate change in his life.

But for Nicodemus, it took longer. The seeds planted needed time to grow.

Whether he was aware of it or not, the Spirit was at work in Nicodemus, leading him down a path that was scary, a path that threatened his comfortable and safe and orderly life. A path that asked him to reevaluate what he believed, how he ordered his life. What he knew to be true about God.

And that’s the scary thing about the Holy Spirit. As Luther tells us, the Spirit comes when and where and to whom the Spirit pleases, giving as many gifts as the Spirit pleases.[[1]](#footnote-1) We may catch glimpses, we may be utterly oblivious. We certainly never comprehend precisely how the Spirit works. We just know, as St. Paul tells us in Romans, that the Spirit works to carry out the will of God.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Spirit will do what the Spirit will do. Being born of the Spirit means allowing God to order our lives. It means being open to the possibilities of new ways of understanding how God works in the world, reevaluating what we think we know about God, and realizing that God’s mercy is bigger than our understanding.

It means living out our baptismal promises and saying, “Here I am, Lord. Send me,” and finding that the Spirit has given us the courage we will need to answer the call.

We don’t always recognize the pivot moments in our lives. Sometimes, they’re blindingly obvious, but I think that more often than not, they sneak up on us, and it’s not until much later that we realize how important our response in the moment was.

I think that God really wants us to be open to possibilities.

Because when we’re open to possibilities, when we’re willing to say, “Here I am! Send me!” we’re open to a new way of being in the world, a new way of understanding the world. And that’s a good thing, because Jesus didn’t die for us so that we would never need to change.

Jesus died to show us how much God loves us, how true the words of John 3:16 are.

May the love God has freely and abundantly given us fill our hearts and lead us on paths of obedient faith.

1. *Luther’s Works* v 47 p 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Romans 8:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)