

As one who has spent many years in the classroom, I was always amazed at the eagerness of students who wanted to be chosen for a specific purpose, or task. Hands would shoot up in the air with rocket speed when the teacher asks for a helper... or someone to step outside of what they were doing in order to help. “Who would like to lead the class as we walk to lunch? Who wants to be the line leader?” “I do!” “Who would like to take this note to the office?” “I will!” “And who wants to wipe down the desks, erase the board and share their story about the weekend?” “Call on me, Ms. D., call on me!!!” “Here I am!”

While reflecting on these experiences of the classroom and digging into the lessons this week, I wondered... what happens to *our* enthusiasm - our eagerness - when we are asked to serve in our church, our community or step up to walk alongside someone who is in need, especially if it out of our comfort zone. What happens to our excited response when we sense God is tugging at our heartstrings to step into the arena of the unknown - placing us, perhaps, in a very vulnerable space? And what happens when we *have* stepped into that arena and it didn't turn out the way we thought it would turn out. And the results were anything but favorable. In fact, it was a disaster according to our measure of success. We felt defeated, discouraged and doubt begins to seep in as to whether we were up to the job in the first place. Where does our enthusiasm go?

“Call on me, Ms. D., call on me!!!” “Here I am!!” Here I am...Here...I..am - pick me.”

In our reading from Isaiah today, the writer doesn't indicate if the prophet raised his hand with great enthusiasm at the initial call to speak on behalf of God, but the dialogue does provide us with insight as to what might have been going on as the prophet pauses to reflect on his call. You see the prophet-servant outlines an auto-biographical sketch - or a description of *his* understanding of what the work or mission of a prophet-(servant) *should* look like and what it “*has*” looked like thus far.

*The Lord called me before I was born, while still in my mother's womb.* The prophet recognizes where his identity has come from right from the get-go, right from the beginning; if fact, even before the beginning. And the prophet/servant also indicates that God even provided him with perhaps the hard, but necessary messages to deliver: *He made my mouth like a sharp sword.* And perhaps provided a place to deliver the message - and perhaps he was one of many people in the designated area (one of many who were called: *He made me a polished arrow and hid it in his quiver.* You see, the prophet/servant had the necessary tools to do the "job", right from the get-go.

However...the story doesn't end there. And maybe this is where the prophets' enthusiasm wanes, where discouragement sets in, maybe even a bit of resentment. Maybe it's where my enthusiasm wanes at times, too - when called to take on a bigger piece of the puzzle, when called into unfamiliar territory; when called to a purpose not fully understood. Especially, especially if we feel we have labored in vain. Especially if we feel our exhaustion and our strength diminished.

But thankfully, I think, it doesn't end here. God doesn't cancel the call even at the servant's request. No, what does God do...he ups the ante. God raises the stakes. Because God's purpose for the prophet, for you and for me was right there from the beginning. I.. have even.. spent all my strength for nothing...it was all in vain! "Look God, the people are still living in chaos, war is still thriving, tribes are divided and all that I have said and done has not changed the "big" picture of a broken land and people gone astray. I tried to reach those people of Israel and I failed.

You gotta love God's response to the prophet's perceived defeat...I'm not letting you off the hook that easy. I have a new job for you, a new call - one where you will be a light to all nations. In other words, your territory will be expanded. ...and God.. will give.. the prophet/servant what he needs...because you see...it's not up to him!!! The prophets identity, your identity, my identity - our call into God's enduring love was established long before any of us got involved. You know, I wonder...if this was an

“AHA” - epiphany moment for the prophet. I wonder if this is an Aha” moment for us, too...

In our gospel lesson today, we hear from John the Baptist once again. Last week he had his own ‘aha’ when asked by Jesus to baptize *Jesus* - a vulnerability on both John and Jesus’ part. This week, in some respect, we encounter a bit of that same vulnerability among the disciples. And... maybe even with a bit of curiosity and eagerness on the part of the disciples.

After John introduces Jesus and exclaims... here - here is the guy you want to follow, testifying that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus begins the conversation with the apostles with this question: “*What are you looking for? And they respond: “Rabbi, Teacher, where are you staying?”* and Jesus responds, “*Come and see.*” Come and see? Come and see? Sounds a bit risky to me. Stay with Jesus?

The word ‘*stay*’ in Greek is: *abide or remain*; stay with Jesus, not just for a night at the local inn - but sticking around for the long haul. For the bigger purpose. *Abiding* with Jesus, you see, indicates more than a casual encounter. *Abiding* with Jesus means... relationship with Jesus - a state of being with the *One* whose purpose is to turn the world upside down. A state of being that brings food to the hungry, justice to the oppressed and love to the unlovely... A call...a call... to a greater purpose. “Come and see.” Come with me.

And as with the prophet/servant in Isaiah realized that answering the call means God doesn’t get stuck in the tidy resolutions to our crises that we think end the story. I don’t know about you, but I often believe that if things turn out okay, the story is over. If the church makes budget, then “whew, thank God, that was close!” (or pays off a mortgage - now we can sit back and relax). Or if we get through a health scare, we are humbled and grateful. Or if our term on the ministry is done, we can step back from serving for awhile. Yet God is not done. These so-called endings are beginnings, each a new horizon of possibility. Not for ourselves alone, but for the world God loves. God’s story is always bigger than ours, holding *our* stories within God’s story and weaving them into the wide-open future.

Being called while in relationship with Jesus means stepping into places and spaces where we may already have tried our best - but to no avail. It may mean opening our arms a little wider...and *it will* mean trusting in the one who holds our identity. And it just might mean you and me...we... we get to live into more AHA moments... little epiphanies of our own as we answer the call ...for a purpose. For God's purpose. So maybe...just maybe...when we are called...to whatever task that lies ahead of us... we may say, "Here I Am, Lord. Pick me!" Amen.