

Imagining God's call (Isaiah 6:1-13; Luke 5:1-11)

I wonder what Isaiah is expecting when he raises his hand.

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February 7, 2025

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One day I was looking through old journals of mine when I came across a curious entry. In high school I was trying to figure out who I was, what my gifts were, what God might require of me. And I wrote that I remembered worshiping on Sunday morning in our church's new sanctuary. We were a mission congregation, and we had just completed one more section of the church building—a sanctuary. I was sitting with my family, listening to the pastor, who was an engaging speaker, and also listening to the hymns and the liturgy, when an alien thought crossed my mind: *If I were a man, that is what I would want to do.*

Is that a call story? Was the little voice inside my head the voice of God? If so, it's odd that I wrote about it in a journal and then forgot about it for many years. Or maybe not. Call stories usually have something odd about them. Isaiah in the temple, for example, sounds like a hallucinatory vision. The Lord sitting on the throne (no description except the hem of his garment) surrounded by seraphs who look nothing like Victorian angels. Isaiah rightly recoils. Then he hears God say, "Whom shall I send, and who shall go for me?" and Isaiah raises his hand and volunteers.

I wonder what he imagines God calling him to do. And I wonder what he thinks when he learns what his assignment really is. In the presence of the glory of God, he is called to preach judgment and destruction and, at the end, a tiny seed.

Simon and his friends are called to fish for people. I wonder what they think it will be like. Does it turn out the way they planned? I look back at my old journal, and I wonder.

When I sat in the sanctuary and imagined doing the pastor's work, I admit, I imagined something glorious. I imagined a room full of people, listening to *me* (a shy person and the wrong gender). I imagined the glory of that full church and being in the limelight, ascending to the pulpit. I did not know anything else that a pastor did. But I thought I was ready to sign on.

I didn't know then that the church I was called to serve would be called "declining," a dying institution. I didn't know then how different everything would look. I didn't know then how my particular gifts would fit, or not fit, the call of God.

It's hard to deny the call of God when you have angels all around you or you are overwhelmed by a boatload of fish. But we often imagine it differently than it turns out.

There are boats full of fish but also rejection—and a cross. There are angels around us singing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord," but the depths of darkness will also be explored. None of us knows what we are getting into. Not Isaiah, not Simon, not us.

Somehow, and for some odd reason, we still say, "Here I am. Send me." The call is into the light, but also into the abyss. In both places, we will find God. Or God will find us.