

“Go! Give! Gather!”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
February 9, 2025 - Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

[Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11](#)

A recent change in the head of government was causing all kinds of upheaval and unrest. And it was at this unsettled and unsettling time, the year that King Uzziah died after reigning over Judah for 52 years, that the prophet Isaiah experienced an incredible vision in Jerusalem. Isaiah was there in the temple when he saw a vision of God seated upon a throne, higher and loftier than the throne of Uzziah had been or his successors would be, and higher and loftier than the throne of the emperor of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, that was even then encroaching upon their land and would soon conquer Israel, their neighbor to the north. So great and lofty was God in Isaiah’s vision, just the hem of God’s robe filled the whole temple as six-winged, heavenly creatures hovered above, singing with voices so mighty that the temple doors violently shook. “Holy, holy, holy is God,” they sang with thunderous voices, and then they also proclaimed that, though holy and apart from people and their ways, God’s glory still filling the whole earth.

Recognizing he was unworthy of being in the presence of the divine ruler of all, Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me! For I am a person with unclean lips living among impure people, and yet I have seen the ruler of heaven and earth.”

But then one of the angelic creatures took with tongs a red-hot coal from the fire of the altar that was burning in the temple and held it to Isaiah’s lips and said to him, “With this fire of worship, you and your words have been purified.”

Then with a voice more thunderous than that of the angels, God called out, “Whom shall I send to the people to speak and act on my behalf?”

Isaiah, humble and unclean but purified responded, “Here I am; send me!”

And the prophet Isaiah was sent by God to go out and proclaim to the unholy people living in their time of trouble the words of God most high.

This story of Isaiah’s amazing vision and calling is echoed in the likewise-amazing story of our gospel lesson from Luke, which tells us about Jesus’ own amazing deeds and calling of his disciples. We heard in the lesson about Jesus, at the

beginning of his time of ministry, proclaiming his message to crowds who had gathered by the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Lake of Gennesaret. So great were the crowds gathering around him, he asked a fisherman named Simon, who was then on the shore, packing up his nets after a full (but unsuccessful) night of fishing, to take him out into the lake, just a bit offshore, so that he could sit and teach the crowd that had gathered on the shoreline.

After teaching, Jesus then told Simon not to head back to shore, but to head out to deeper waters and to drop his net once more to catch fish. Now Simon was no novice, and as a professional fisherman, he knew where and how to fish, and when to head back into shore when there aren't any fish to be caught. Jesus, in contrast, was not a professional fisherman, but a newly-practicing teacher, whose resume consisted of only one line: Woodworker of Joseph and Sons Carpentry Shop in Nazareth. And who was this teacher, formerly a landlubbing, shop-bound craftsman, to tell Simon, a life-long harvester of the sea, where and how to catch fish?

But unlike the crowds that we heard about last week, that heard Jesus' message as he taught in his hometown synagogue and then immediately rejected him and his teaching, wanting to throw him over a cliff, Simon responded to Jesus' teaching from his boat to the crowds and then instruction in his boat to Simon himself *with faithful obedience*: "OK, Jesus," he said. "We've worked all night and caught nothing, but if you say to go out and fish again, we will go out and fish again."

Sure enough, as soon as Simon the fisherman went out again with Jesus and dropped his net as instructed, it filled with so many fish that it began to burst. There were so many fish, more boats had to be called in to gather them all up and to take them back to shore. Amazed by this catch of fish, Simon, whose name was then changed to Peter, fell down on his knees in awe, saying, "Woe is me! Go away from me because I am a sinful, impure person!"

Then Jesus said to him and his fishing partners James and John to fear not and to give up their lives as gatherers of fish to become gatherers of people. Immediately, they left everything -- boats, nets, fish, an old name -- they left all they had ever known to follow Jesus as his students, to learn from him and then to continue his work as gatherers of people.

This story about fishermen being called to the vocation of going out and doing God's work follows the story of Isaiah's calling and many others from the Bible that teach us that our holy God has words to offer and work to do in this unholy world of people with unclean lips and impure hearts, and that God chooses to prepare and use common people to do this uncommon, divine work.

In our own time, with its local snow emergencies, national political turmoil, international problems of nations seeking to conquer and subdue others, and a global climate emergency, divine work and heaven-sent words are needed. And God still sends common people to offer God's life-giving words and to do God's life-building work.

God call us to this work today. But will we be like Peter, James, John, and Isaiah in saying yes to the call? Will we fear not and head out into the unknown, even if doing so goes against what we know through our life experiences to be the safest or surest course of action? If asked, will we give up common, good things we know -- our time, talent, and treasure -- for the sake of embracing the better, more glorious things of God, like service to our neighbors and world?

Friends, let us go where Christ calls us to go. Let us give words and do work as God enables us. Let us gather people to the grace of Christ our savior. And as we go, give, and gather, may God be with us and work in us and through us, and may we enjoy more of God's life and peace. Amen.