

Usually that first reading we heard this morning from Isaiah will provide the preacher a perfect opportunity to tell their call story, when they felt as if they were responding to God's desire with a resounding "Here I am! Send me!" But, hopefully, we have reached the point in our generations' worth of maturing process as the church that we recognize such call stories are, by no means, limited to clergy or any church leadership, for that matter. God, in fact, sends us all out, not just those with a clerical collar.

I remember one of my first big kid jobs was serving as a camp counselor at Lutheran Memorial Camp, about an hour north of Columbus. I served there two summers in the middle of my college years, and let's just say...I was okay with being done after those two summers. Granted, there were some incredibly special moments with young people: campfires, Bible studies in open fields, hikes through the woods, the stars filling the open night skies. Nevertheless, I was okay with being done sleeping in cabins all summer with little ventilation, not to mention boys just being boys more often than not; and, quite honestly, I just wasn't sure I was making any kind of a difference in their lives.

The next summer came: I had graduated from college, and it was time to start preparations for seminary. So, that meant, instead of being stuck in cabins, I was, instead, stuck in a classroom for an eight-week crash course on the Greek language. Except, I still had just enough of a fondness leftover for that camp that I drove back there every weekday to help with mowing lawns and other random needs through the afternoon hours.

Now, after the class had come to an end that summer, I was still helping out at the camp for a while longer before the fall session kicked in at seminary with a full class-load to come. Then, there was this one week when one of the camp counselors wasn't going to be able to be on-site for whatever reason; and, so, of course, the program director asked me to fill the spot. "Whom shall I send to take care of these boys," I suppose she could have thought.

However, I responded with the typical human avoid-responsibility reaction: "I just don't have it in me anymore. I don't think I would be good enough at it. Someone else could do it better than me." And, still to this day, I remember exactly what she said. I remember the exact

building where we were, the exact room, the exact spot she was standing, when her comeback made me cringe: “Brad, do you really believe the words that are comin’ out of your mouth, right now?”

That’s not the way any call story is supposed to go. There’s not supposed to be attitude about it. God, in any way: whether from the sky or a burning bush or through another sister or brother in Christ, is not supposed to have sarcasm or irony or anything that isn’t just the “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” mode. That’s just not God-like for us. But I wonder if this Isaiah passage does not set us up for God to be exactly that to us from time-to-time.

We wait for that invitation from the clouds. We wait for that call from a burning bush. We wait for that sister or brother in Christ to push us forward into service, oftentimes against our will. All so that we can have our Isaiah triumphal moment of “Here I am! Send me!” Except, hopefully, we have reached the point in our generations’ worth of maturing process as the church in realizing that...we have already been sent by God! And, I like to think that God is more than entitled to have a

little bit of an attitude to drive the holy point into the thick of our very soul.

I like to think God could say to us right now not through a booming voice in the clouds or a vision of seraphs, as it was for Isaiah; but even through the stillness of water. God says, “What do you think this baptism thing is for? I sent you out in those very baptismal waters, out onto the shores of lives who need you more than you will ever care to admit. And then, what do you think this bread and wine is for, after all? Yes, for your own spiritual nourishment, but I send you back not just to your pew, but out into that world, my world that I died for. I send you every time from this very table to be a glimpse of that sacrificing love. And, come to think of it, what do you think every day in this life is for, anyway? For your good, yes, but for you to be that goodness to others too: whether that be at your work, at your play, or in phone calls and letters or the simple smiles of acknowledgement, as if the other child of mine is worthy of your love, my love, too. You don’t have to wait for me to send you out. I already did that, and I do it again and again and again.”

That's nice and all God, but we humans want more. Sometimes we want a different call story altogether that ends up with a diploma on the wall or an official title to be displayed on a door. And yet, God will still keep on sending us out through the simplest of means, through the everyday of life. And God will keep on doing it not because this God has a demanding attitude about it: that "We better do it or else!"; but because God cherishes this entire humanity that needs a collected effort of even the simplest means of what *we* have to offer.

Nevertheless, no matter how much we push back, no matter how much we wait for something more, through it all we cling to the moment when God sent the Son into the world not to condemn it, but to save it, to save us, to save all of us. The Great News that we still depend on in this life is that such holy work has already been taken care of without our help; and it sets us free from sin and death, yes, but even sets us free from our very selves that get in the way. Evidently, still, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. That love has been sent upon us, and it will never be taken away now and forevermore. And for that Greatest News of all, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.