



I want to tell you about a young man named, “Leeroy.” “Leeroy” was considered to be on the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum. So, even though during his teenage years, he would often be placed with the elementary age children for Sunday school, “Leeroy” was much advanced in many other aspects of the social scene on a Sunday morning. For instance, the first thing “Leeroy” would do whenever he walked into the church building with his grandmother, is he would leave her in the dust by the front door, and he rushed up to

the front pew, because, immediately, he had to shake my hand, and ask what I was doing. It was his own “Leeroy” special way of checking in to see how things were going for me. And, of course, by that time, his grandmother had made it to that near-front pew, where they always sat, and “Leeroy” made sure I shook “Granny’s” hand before worship could ever start.

Yes, “Leeroy” was “different” in many people’s eyes, but for me, he was a loving, sincere, almost holy kind of different. He was under the impression that in spite of what society would focus on that made him differently-abled than the majority of the population, he could still offer something for the benefit of others; as if he was responding to God’s plea for him to make others smile, to make people in those pews and outside the church walls altogether believe in the goodness of God’s children near and far away. Regardless of the label that was placed on “Leeroy,” he still had just as much to offer the world as the prophet Isaiah did in the first reading we heard this morning. After all, “Leeroy’s” ultimate identity unleashed by the Triune God, had nothing to do with autism, or the skin color that was different than the rest of the white-majority congregation. No, “Leeroy” was from the beginning, is now, and always will be a most precious child of God, a child of God who always made the rest of us better for being in his presence.

One of “Leeroy’s” gifts he shared as a loving witness to the Gospel emerged during the children’s sermon. As the young people made their way up front, “Leeroy” would always get a basket and a box: the basket for the youngsters who had an offering to contribute to the church that week, and the box had packaged snacks inside (perhaps, as a way to lure them to be part of the children’s sermon that they may not have gone along with otherwise). But it wasn’t just that “Leeroy” made sure those things got setup before we started the children’s sermon; it was that, after we had our concluding prayer, he made absolutely certain that every child got a snack. Because, it wasn’t just about getting the treat; it was about making sure that child realized they were part of God’s family, that they were loved no matter what. “Leeroy” made absolutely certain of that every single time.

“Leeroy’s” work wasn’t done yet, though. During the sharing of the peace, he not only walked around to shake other’s people’s hands, he made sure, of course, that everyone shook “Granny’s” hand, too. And then, he rushed, again, up-front and met me off to the side of the altar as we both washed our hands before getting Communion ready for all God’s children there that day. Yes, I suppose, technically, for the liturgical police in the wider church, only the pastor should be doing the preparation for celebrating the Lord’s Supper. But “Leeroy” had too much passion, too much love, too much Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, flowing through him to ever make me dare consider stopping his holy infectious enthusiasm.

Come to think of it, there was plenty of holiness flowing around the prophet Isaiah in the vision that was described in the first reading. So much holiness that Isaiah wasn't quite sure he was worthy of the moment, or worthy of going forward and sharing with others the needed reassurance of hope and new life. Eventually, he comes around to saying the beloved line, "Here I am. Send me." And as beautiful as that response from Isaiah is, we still have our moments of being like him leading up to that moment: we're not sure if we're worthy enough to share the powerful Good News with others, not sure if we're talented enough to offer anything that would be beneficial at all, not sure if we're in the right age-bracket to have anything left to give. And so, we wait for an out-of-this-world Isaiah experience for God to convince us that we still have enough Father, Son, and Holy Spirit flowing through us to make a difference.

Except, there's no need to wait around. No need to wait for a booming voice from heaven. Because, the truth is we have been sent from the beginning. We have been sent out from our baptism. We have been sent from each time we took Communion. We have been sent every time we prayed. We may have had our fair share of overlooking God's persistent call, but nevertheless, God is convinced we all have something to offer, regardless of age, physical ability, GPA, work resume' or anything else. We don't need to wait around for an Isaiah moment, because God calls us through the holy beautiful simplicity of life as well.

One of those beautiful simplicities that "Leeroy" always offered us was during many of the hymns. "Leeroy," evidently, missed the memo that was passed down through Lutheran churches ever since Martin Luther himself: that Lutherans are not wired to move at all when they sing. Nevertheless, "Leeroy" showed us there was more than enough reason to dance to the music. And no, we don't need to have all the steps of Christ-following down. We don't have to make sure we're perfect, before we take the first step. We don't have to have this whole faith thing all figured out. It's about believing that there is more than enough of the entire Holy Trinity flowing through us to convince us to join along in the most beautiful dance of hope that has been going on since the beginning and will never stop for all eternity. So, for that holy dance of boundless love that has reeled "Leeroy" in and all of us with a grace beyond our wildest imagination, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.