

Post-Pandemic. Post-Pentecost!

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

So, there is a lot going on around Isaiah as he shares his prophetic vision we heard today. There is certainly this awesome, overwhelming experience of God at the heart of today's reading. But there are heavy politics in Isaiah's time. You see, his nation, Judah, has been ruled by King Uzziah. The economy has been good, but there is also an arrogance shown by leaders. Superpowers are looming, but the nation's leaders seem unconcerned.

Isaiah is awash in this apathetic culture. He himself does not feel worthy, not ready. Why can't a prophet be celebrated by the people? Isaiah is going through a lot. Traumatized.

I wonder: would he have heard God's voice if it was a still small voice like Elijah heard in the quiet of the wilderness? He needed the grandeur of God, the sting of hot coal on his mouth to convince him that his shortcomings, his bad habits, are wiped clean.

The Divine Other, God who reigns over Kings, needs him.

Does this experience of Isaiah's, this divine encounter, feel somehow similar to our experience of worship?¹ Stay with me here. There is the encounter, Seraphim and human praising God, we do that in worship; then, there is an acknowledgment of what can be called sin, maybe we don't say "I am not worthy" exactly, but without some sense of "confession" our worship would feel empty – acknowledgment of our attitudes and actions that are harmful to us or to others.

Then there is the call... Oh that call: *Who will go for us...* for "us." Is that God in the plural? God is not alone. God of community. For Christians, we call it Trinity. Who will go for us? Send me... the Blessing, with the breath of the Spirit blowing us out of worship. In these days it is the nudge to click on a donate button to support a church's ministry, or an important cause, or maybe we are shoved from our desk chair or couch to do something, to call someone.

God is calling us.

We can become so normalized by this pandemic into passivity – stay home, stay out of public gatherings. We have been courageous in caring for one another in this way, but it takes its toll. This sure has been a wild ride, hasn't it? Arrogance and short-sightedness in politics. I have to say that I have seen a bit of short-sightedness even among a few spiritual communities who have seen their physical gathering for worship as "essential", perhaps of greater importance than the call to care for one another and worship from home.

That din, those noises of our culture, can drown out God. Just last week we celebrated the birthday of Christ's Church. That moment that none of Jesus' followers expected.

¹ Kristin Emery Saldine draws the comparison between Isaiah's context of holy worship and our similar experience of Christian worship. "Pastoral Perspective". *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Year B, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1* (Prophets 3-16).

They had been traumatized by persecution, and ultimately the violent death of their Lord, leader, friend. I guess they needed a pretty grand experience there. They got it – an experience of Spirit like fire, peasants speaking inexplicably in languages of lands they had never been to.

If only you and I could have such a grand experience. Pandemic trauma has taken its toll on all of us. Many of us are coping courageously, but it takes its toll. Essential workers, God bless you, you have felt at risk being out among people, to care for them. Many of us have learned what Zoom means, worked and served as educational assistants for our kids.

My friends, there is something ahead, I can feel it – a Call to each one of you, and to me, post pandemic. We are emerging from a spiritual malaise, and a profound need for voices of love and compassion. So many have lost so much. You probably have lost much; economic challenges, health systems exhausted, communities that have been in hibernation invited to emerge, slowly, carefully, and connect. I suspect that this will be a challenge – connecting.

We might not get the grand theophany of Spirit falling like fire or seraphim praising and a divine voice asking, “Who will go?”

Maybe this week we can carve out some quiet time, meditative time, to listen attentively and prayerfully. Moments where we

...clear away the cacophony of contemporary sounds...the jangling of cell phones...the blasts of wartime, the deafening drones of leaf blowers, and the ugly shouts of partisan politics. [Maybe] When those marauders are named and cleared away, [we] will be quickened by the quiet ... that in true silence, the holy God will draw near.²

When the Spirit sings... dare to dance.

When God calls you – loudly or softly – answer. Amen,

² “Homiletical Perspective” by G. Lee Ramsey Jr. (paraphrasing Barbara Brown Taylor). Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Year B, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Prophets 3-16).