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Homiletical Studies

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, SERIES C

Isaiah 6:1-8

What Would Move Us to Tell the Good News about Jesus?

The account of God's call to Isaiah is highly sensory: visual (an overwhelming sight of the Lord and His seraphim), auditory (the exclamation of the angels—which even caused the doorposts of the temple to shake—and the voice of the Lord Himself), tactile (the trembling of the temple), olfactory (the smell of smoke), even gustatory (as the hot coal touches Isaiah's tongue). This would suggest a sermon that also engages more than the intellect, a dramatic and emotional message that seeks to replicate Isaiah's vision. The goal is that our hearers, too, will answer, "Here am I, send me!"

Introduction: In the year that King Uzziah died, the prophet Isaiah saw a vision. I mean, a vision—angels, earthquake, the Lord Himself; smoke, fire, a voice that could bring down the house. A vision! By the time Isaiah had seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted all that the Lord had for him to experience that day, the prophet was ready to do whatever God wanted him to do. And what God wanted him to do was go and tell people what God wanted them to hear—above all else, the news of a coming Messiah. Short of such a vision—or maybe *not* short of such a vision—what would move us to tell the good news about Jesus?

- I. Perhaps realizing that our plight in sin is as desperate as Isaiah's.
 - A. Maybe we would realize our plight if we, too, experienced the trauma of losing our leader (1a).
 1. Uzziah's death after 52 years on the throne rocked Judah's security and stability.
 2. We pray in these days for our new president, but throughout our generation, failures of national leaders—and our acceptance of their failures—have rocked the image of a nation under God.
 - B. Maybe we would realize our plight if we, too, saw the Lord Himself on His throne, exalted above us (1).
 1. Picture Isaiah's vision: in Solomon's temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a soaring structure

reaching forty-five feet straight up, the almighty Lord of hosts towering above, His train filling the sanctuary.

2. When Christ returns, we will see Him, not in His humiliation as we are accustomed, but on His throne as judge (Revelation 1:7).
- C. Maybe we would realize our plight if we, too, saw how even the seraphim view the Almighty (2).
1. The highest of the angels use two of their wings to veil their eyes from God's glory (*LW* 278:3, *TLH* 341:3).
 2. How would we fall down before Him?!!
- D. Maybe we would realize our plight if we, too, witnessed the full holiness of the Lord (3).
1. "Holy, holy, holy," the seraph cried of the Trinity.
 2. Do we really envision God as holy, or only as love?
- E. Maybe we would realize our plight if God shook our sanctuary, too, and filled it with smoke (4).
1. The thunderous cry! The shock! The smell of smoke!
 2. Illustration: The Sylmar, California earthquake in 1969 — one of the "big ones" — struck just before dawn. One teenage girl, staggering out into the street, voiced what many reportedly wondered: "Dad, is this the end of the world?" Our existence is that fragile, always just one instant from total destruction.
 3. The end will come, and, when it does, we dare not stand before God unprepared in our sins.

All of this certainly drove Isaiah to realize his desperate sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (5). This was a first step in moving Isaiah to tell the news of the Messiah. What more is necessary to move us to tell the good news about Jesus?

- II. Perhaps realizing that our forgiveness is as cleansing as Isaiah's.
- A. Isaiah was assured – visibly, tangibly – that he was cleansed of his sins. (6-7)
1. The hot coal touching his lips, the declaration of forgiveness spoken by no less than God's own messenger, a heavenly seraph!
 2. What an absolution!
- B. But have we not heard, seen, felt, tasted, smelled our cleansing from sin just as certainly?
1. When God's messenger, taking water, pouring it over our heads, once said, "I baptize you in name of the Holy, Holy, Holy."
 2. When the same messenger of God, standing before the high altar, announces: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. . . . Your iniquity is taken away, your sin is purged."
 3. And if that is not enough, when God's messenger really does take something from the altar, touches your lips with it, and says, "Take eat, take drink, this is the body and blood the Lord of hosts, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."
- C. Isaiah's vision moved him to say, "Here am I, send me!" (8)
- D. Does our "vision" move us to tell the good news about Jesus?

Conclusion: The Lord speaks today and asks who will go and tell a world, just as desperate in sin as we, about its only Savior. Are we as aware of our sinful plight as Isaiah was? Do we realize that we have been cleansed of those sins as tangibly, as certainly, as Isaiah was? If we are, if we do, then when God asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" we will have an answer.

Carl C. Fickenscher II
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THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT, SERIES C

Jeremiah 26:8-15

Tell the Good News No Matter What

The text reminds us that one who speaks God's word can get into trouble for doing so. The goal of the sermon is that hearers tell the good news. The problem is that we are afraid. The means to the goal is point to Christ and what He has done for us. How can we not speak of Him?

Introduction: The sermon text might not strike us as a typical "evangelism" text, but it can help us face up to our fears. Often, fear keeps us from telling the good news about Jesus. There is no question that speaking God's word *can* get one into trouble – big trouble. So it was with our Lord Himself, as with the prophets before Him. We will see Jeremiah undergoing a trial for his life which, in many ways, resembles Jesus' trial, and be encouraged to tell the good news:

- I. In spite of all fightings without and fears within (see verses 8-11).
 - A. The world attacks us for speaking of law and gospel. Such talk:
 1. Exposes as helpless the world's alleged sources of security, like Jeremiah did when he told people the temple's mere presence wouldn't save them.
 2. Strikes the unbeliever as insulting or irrelevant (note that as Jeremiah's opponents quoted him in verse 9, they did not mention the merciful dimension of his message found in verse 3; they found it irrelevant).
 - B. We ought not be silenced.
 1. Sometimes it does not take something as big as a death threat to shut us up. It is hard to tell the good news even in our own families.
 2. Why are we so ashamed? This is critically important! See Matthew 10:32-33.
- II. With confidence in the Lord Who made us His (see verses 12-15).
 - A. He gives us cause for confidence.
 1. He saves us.

- a. Jeremiah faced his fears as one assured of his destiny. So can we.
 - b. Recall how much Jesus loved Peter who denied Him (Luke 22:54-62) or Jerusalem which had murdered the prophets (Luke 13:34).
 - c. Jesus' death was the most extreme case of shedding "innocent blood." The cross stands as the testimonial to and result of His saving love.
 - d. The empty tomb means we have good news for everyone—even ourselves.
2. He sends us.
- a. We are not prophets like Jeremiah. Most of us are not called preachers (pastors), either. But we do have the privilege of taking the word of God to our neighbors wherever we can in our Christian lives.
 - b. *Illustration:* In Philippians 3:20 Paul wrote to people at the Roman military colony of Philippi. Though they were far from home, they were citizens of Rome, and they got their status, security, and confidence from that fact as they lived *as Romans* in the world. Paul told them that their real home (πολίτευμα) was heaven, and they could draw their strength from this reality while they held their heads high as God's people in the world. So it is with us; our identity as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation is a *gift* from God which moves us to tell the good news.
- B. We are not silenced.
1. The more we are in the word, the more naturally we give forth God's message, and do so with fidelity (as Jeremiah did, verses 18-19).
 2. By the power of the word, we become not merely more like the man Jeremiah, but more like the One into Whom we are baptized—Christ, our Lord, Who made the good confession (1 Timothy 6:13) as part of His saving work for us.

Conclusion: The most natural thing for people in the word is to tell the good news. Start with the people with whom you are most consistently in the word, like your family. Speak the word to one another, even if all you do at first is to repeat the Scriptures, catechism, and hymns. Listen to the good news you speak, and recall that it is good news of forgiveness for you too! You will be amazed at what happens next.

Ken Schurb
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THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, SERIES C

John 20:19-23

Three Things Most Needful

Introduction: John 20:19-23 records the very first meeting of the "Tell the Good News About Jesus" society. It began as a pretty chaotic meeting, marked by fear (the doors were locked), guilt (they were all deserters), doubt (could they really believe the rumors, the sightings?), and confusion (what to do with the rest of their lives now?). But when Jesus arrived at the meeting, He brought the three things His followers needed most—three P's: peace, purpose, and power.

I. The Three Things Most Needful

- A. His followers needed peace of mind, heart, and soul. They needed to know that everything really was okay with their Lord and that everything was okay between them and their Lord. They needed to know that peace that passes understanding, peace that can exist amid fearful circumstances. Jesus now stands before them and not once, but twice offers them that first great "P" — "peace": "Peace be with you" (verses 19, 21), the blessed assurance that everything is okay.
- B. His followers also needed a renewed sense of purpose. They needed to know whether to try to get out of Jerusalem, whether to head back to boats and nets and tax collector's office, whether to go back to life the way it was three years before, should that even be possible now. Jesus stands before them and provides the second great "P" — "purpose": "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (verse 21). Life would never be the same

again. Their lives would have a great purpose. They would be partners in His mission by telling the good news about Jesus.

- C. His followers, a small band of common people called to be partners in mission in a dangerous and contrary world, would need to be able to do great things. Jesus stands before them and gives them the third great "P" – "power." Breathing on them, He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (verses 22-23). They would have the power of the Holy Spirit within them and the external power of the means of grace, the office of the keys, to affect the hardest substance on earth, unrepentant human hearts.

II. Still the Three Things Most Needful

- A. We, Jesus' followers today, still harbor much fear, guilt, and doubt. We often feel overwhelmed, and we know we have been deserters also. We need peace of mind, heart, and soul just as much as did Jesus' early followers. We need to know that in spite of everything, everything is okay. And Jesus is with us today in word and sacrament, offering the first great "P" of our Christian lives, "peace." He offers it more than twice when we meet, after this sermon ("The peace of God which passes understanding..."), after we receive His body and blood ("Depart in peace") and more. It is His word to us throughout the service and as we reenter the mission field of our daily lives (...and give you peace"). Everything is okay, thanks be to Him.
- B. We are also in constant need of a renewed sense of purpose, for the songs of our age affect us also. Lines from popular songs of yesteryear, "What's It All About, Alfie?" and "Is That All There Is, My Friend?" capture so much of the confusion and emptiness of our times. Like waterbugs on a pond, we see people today dart from one interest to another, only to try something else again to effect a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. We don't need to join the chorus or the hectic life on the pond. Jesus provides the second "P" of our lives, the "purpose" of partnership with Him, of being the sent ones to provide to this world the only thing that finally matters.

- C. We go about our business with His assurance of the third great "P," "power," in our lives. Through word and sacraments, true spiritual power enters our lives as surely as if Jesus Himself breathed on us and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He equips us with powerful tools, means of His grace, to assure forgiveness of sins to all who repent, asking of us not results but the faithful telling of the good news through law-and-gospel preaching and teaching, the faithful administration of the sacraments through His church, and our own faith-full sharing of the gospel with others.

Conclusion: Left to our own whims and fancies, we might like some other "P's" from Jesus. "Prosperity," for one, is always nice. "Pleasure" also quickly comes to mind. But Jesus brings via our text, when we stop to think about it, the three that finally make the difference for this life and the life to come. "Have peace," He says. "Have purpose." "Have power."

Raymond Hartwig
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THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, SERIES C

John 17:20-26, Acts 16:6-10, Revelation 22:12-17, 20

Jesus Brings Salvation to the World Through You, His Disciples

All three readings appointed for this Sunday fit well between the Ascension of our Lord (celebrated on the preceding Thursday) and the Feast of Pentecost one week away. The gospel and second lesson make reference to Christ's Ascension, and all three highlight that Jesus' salvation is brought to the world through the message of the gospel proclaimed by His church.

The gospel, John 17:20-26, is the final section of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. Earlier in the prayer Jesus speaks of His departure from the world (verses 11, 13) and for the protection of His disciples (verses 9-19). While earlier Jesus said, "I am not praying for the world," now He prays, "for those who will believe in Me through their [the apostles'] message" (verse 20). Jesus sends His life to the world through the message of the apostles.

The first lesson, Acts 16:6-10, recounts the Holy Spirit's interruption and redirection of Paul's missionary journey. The Spirit's change to

Paul's plans, while possibly disquieting to the apostle, brought Christ's salvation to Europe!

In the second lesson, Revelation 22:12-17, 20, the ascended Christ proclaims, "Behold, I am coming soon!" When He returns He will give those washed in His sacrifice entrance to the tree of life. The church responds to Christ's promise, with the joyful shout "Come!" This "Come!" is both a cry to Jesus and an invitation to world "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." (verse 17)

Introduction: Our Lord Jesus Christ ascended triumphantly. After living a perfect life in our stead, crushing Satan's head at His crucifixion, and conquering death at His resurrection, Jesus has opened the way to the Father for all who trust in Him. But now what? We might imagine the angels asking our ascended Lord, "So what happens now? Can we go and bring Your saving work to the ends of the earth? Or are you going to visibly appear before all people and speak in a thundering voice to bring them to repentance?" No, that's not our Lord's plan. In our Savior's prayer on the night of His betrayal He reveals His plan to bring salvation to the world: "My prayer is not for them [my disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You" (John 17:20,21). Jesus brings salvation to the world through you, His disciples.

- I. Jesus prays that through the word of the Apostles we would be one with the Triune God.
 - A. Faith comes through the word of the Apostles, the eyewitnesses of Jesus.
 1. They wrote the eyewitness testimony of Jesus' saving work for us sinners.
 2. Through their word written in Holy Scripture and proclaimed to us by pastors, teachers, parents, and neighbors, God works faith. (Romans 10:17)
 - B. By faith in Christ, we are in a living relationship with the Triune God.
 1. Earlier on the same night, Jesus told His frightened, confused disciples, "I am the Vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5 and following). We're not just next to God, or

-
- friends with God. Branches and vine are intimately connected.
2. Because we are one with God what happens to us, happens to Him. What blessed comfort!
 - a. The ascended Lord's word to Saul, who was persecuting Christians: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4).
 - b. Jesus' pronouncement on Judgment Day: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40).
 3. Because we are one with God, what is His is ours. (verse 22, 24)
 - a. verse 22: Now, Jesus has given us His place as sons of God. As God's children, everything that belongs to God is ours. Just as all forgiveness; peace; love; victory over death, sin, and hell; and the eternal riches of heaven belong to Christ Jesus, so they are ours in Him.
 - b. verse 24: Forever, we will see His eternal glory. Now, we hear of and believe in Jesus' ascension and rule over heaven and earth – then, we will see it all. Since this is our future, we need not worry about earthly rewards, riches or reactions: all heaven is ours. All that is God's is ours through Christ Jesus' saving work.
- II. Jesus prays that His followers, in this unity of faith, would confess to the whole world the saving love of God in the sending of Jesus Christ.
- A. Our Lord's plan is an unbroken chain of faithful confessors – the Father's word to Jesus, Jesus to the apostles, the apostles to the church, and through us to all the world. (verses 20-21, 25-26)
 - B. It is tragic when those who claim to be Christ's church deny Jesus' saving work by:
 1. denying or belittling His word and sacraments.
 2. using something other than Christ's word and sacraments to try to get the world to believe.

- C. You have the blessed joy to confess to a dying world the life Jesus has won for all.

In the second lesson, Revelation 22, Jesus proclaims who He is and how all who are washed in His sacrifice will have life forever. The Holy Spirit and the church cannot help but urge all sinners to receive this gift as they cry out, "Come!" Whoever hears this word is to say it to our dying world too: "And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

As you receive Jesus in His word and body and blood, you are one with Him and the Father, and His word not only saves you, but brings His life through you to others. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' Name. Amen

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