

“A Boy Scout is Brave”
(sermon given 2/7/10 by Scott Jansen)
Isaiah 6:1-8

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[Prayer for Illumination] Awesome God of all the universe, help us to set aside our puny little worlds, and to catch a glimpse of Your majesty—through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray... Amen.

Our reading comes from the old Hebrew Prophet Isaiah. Listen now, for God's word for you....

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ... The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Amen. So ends the reading and may God add a blessing to our understanding.

The call to Isaiah reminds me of the old joke about the Protestant and the Catholic arguing over who was the better listener to God's call in their lives. They argued and argued until finally they both died and met in heaven and they asked God about it, and the Catholic stormed off crying, "God said 'celebRate,' not 'celibate.'"

The way that God called to Isaiah the prophet shows us something about how God calls to us—how God encourages us to do whatever God needs to be done.

And the first thing to notice is that God asks a question. This is not a command. It's not like a general giving an order. God asks, “Who will go for us?” Who will volunteer to go????

I imagine that same question is asked in Boy Scout meetings all the time; if those meetings are anything like they were when I was a Boy Scout so many years ago.... Who will be scoutmaster? Who will be patrol leader? Who will lead the flag ceremony? Who will teach this knot to the new boys?

This is the question that you hear continually in any volunteer organization. Who will go for us??? Who will serve in the leadership position? Boy Scouts don't always jump up and down pointing to themselves when they hear that question. They're more likely to take a step backward and keep their eyes fixed to the ground. Who wants to be patrol leader? “Not me scoutmaster—anybody but me....”
Anybody but me....

It's rare to find a Boy Scout who wants to take on the extra responsibility of being a patrol leader—or any other position of authority. Who wants to do more work—raise your hands? Not too many takers for that. But the boys soon realize that if no one volunteers to be patrol leader, then they can't do any of the fun things they all want to do. They're just stuck there, staring at each other, until somebody volunteers.

It's no different with the leaders we find in the Bible. Moses was called to be a leader, and he said, “not me God, you've picked the wrong guy. I'm not even a mediocre public speaker.” You know, the fear of public speaking is sometimes ranked right up there with fear of giving birth, or even the fear of death....

The best leaders in the Bible always think they are unworthy at first. But, consider this: Moses believed in a God who was the Creator of all the universe, who knew everything there was to know, who knew the hearts of all people, and yet Moses says to this God, “Oh, God, I think you've made a mistake here. Not me, God. You should choose somebody else.” And the same thing was said by Jeremiah and Peter, Paul, and Mary..., and countless others in the Bible. “Are you sure you've got the right person God? Maybe you should check your list again.” When God chooses somebody else, we applaud

God's great wisdom, but when God chooses us, we question God's judgment....

"A Boy Scout is brave." That's what my scoutmaster told me when he asked me to serve as patrol leader, and I told him I didn't feel qualified for the position. "Scott," he said, "a Boy Scout is brave." Now, I hadn't said that I was a coward. What I said was that I was unqualified. But what he heard was cowardice. And, he was right!!! I certainly was just as qualified as anyone else—I was just afraid to do it.

But what all good scoutmasters know is that boy scouts need to be pushed to go beyond their comfort zones, to accept more authority than what they want to accept. That's the only way that they can realize their full potential.

God, of course, also knows that. He didn't let Moses off the hook, nor any of the others. Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." In other words, I'm not qualified to be telling your story, I'm not worthy to be a prophet, nor can I expect to get any support and encouragement from the folks whom you want to hear your message....

True..., but God sent a seraph to Isaiah to say, now your guilt is departed. The seraph was God's way of saying, if I have chosen to ask you, you are the best-qualified candidate, so don't be telling me how unqualified you are....

Scoutmasters can exert tremendous pressure on the boys to step up and to accept responsibility, but ultimately, each boy has to choose to become a leader. The scoutmaster alone cannot make it happen. Likewise, God can exert pressure on you to do what God wants, but ultimately, the choice is yours. You always have free will to turn towards God, or to turn away from God. God calls to you... always. How much energy you put into listening is up to you.

So, how, how does God call to you? Well, God may call to you through Jenny Kolinski when she is seeking volunteers to teach Sunday School. Or God may call through Tara when she's looking for kids to play a part in a skit. Or God may call through Sally when she needs someone to play an instrument for summer worship. Or God may call through the nominating committee when they ask you to serve as Trustee....

Now, some of you may be on record as claiming to be "unqualified" to serve as trustee.... Although, basically, if you are able to climb stairs, unlock door knobs, and flip light switches..., you are

qualified to effectively help the ministry of the trustees. So why do we protest that we're not qualified, when the very fact that we're being called upon means that we are the most qualified person available????

Well.... You may agree that God did not make a mistake in calling Moses or Elijah or Isaiah or Mary, even they thought they were unqualified—God knew better. Yes. But maybe when Jenny calls you, you're not so sure that she is quite as omniscient as God is. You might think, maybe she doesn't realize that you really are unqualified. And so you convince yourself that it's not God who is calling you—it's just Jenny.

But..., is it just Jenny???? Moses had a burning bush to help convince him. Isaiah got to hear the voice of the angels shaking all the walls in the temple. Does your call from God need a little extra kick??? Maybe Jenny just needs to talk a little louder—although her son Henry tells me that she can make the walls of her house shake when she really tries.... I don't know about that.... I know that the phrase, "God loves a cheerful giver" does not apply only to those who are giving money....

In the early days of the Church, shortly after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, there was a dispute called the Donatist controversy. The Donatists claimed that only certain people were truly qualified to serve communion or to baptize. Specifically, they said that those who had denied their Christian faith while being tortured (before Christianity was the official state religion), could never be forgiven of that sin, and so they were not worthy to officiate at sacraments. This argument stretched out for a whole century, but eventually the Church realized that everyone is a sinner, everyone is unworthy, and that the power of the sacraments came, not from the purity of the person administering them, but their power came directly from God....

I'm certainly not "qualified" to represent the living God through the sacrament of Communion. Likewise, no one is "qualified" to teach Sunday School. But God will speak through you if you answer the call. No one is qualified to offer sacred music before the Lord of hosts. But God will accept the offering of the little drummer boy, and God will make it worthy....

If Jenny were really brave, the next time someone says to her, "I'm not worthy," she would reply..., "of course you're not worthy. Who do you think you're kidding? Hah! I know you're not worthy. The

only question is, are you willing to allow God to channel God's power through you?????

That's a scary thought. A boy scout has to be brave because he will never grow up without being brave. But bravery doesn't mean flirting with death. It's not "brave" to walk along the very edge of the cliff with one foot dangling over the edge. That's not brave—that's just stupid. Bravery is the willingness to accept the responsibility of being patrol leader even though you really don't have any idea how you're going to pull it off.

But sometimes bravery really is not the issue at all. Sometimes you believe that you are qualified. Maybe you've felt God's power moving through you in the past, and you're sure it could happen again. Or maybe you just have a lot of self-confidence. Either way, when you hear the call, you know that you would do a good job, but you say "No" anyway.

Not because you feel unqualified. And not because you're uncertain that God is really calling to you. Maybe you say "No" because... you're just tired. You'd rather... relax than to work as God's manifestation here on Earth....

Again, God did not order Isaiah. God asked, "who will go for us?" Yes, but you only have so much energy available. So you ask yourself, does God really deserve my limited energy, my time, my talents? What has God done for me anyway????

A fair question..... When Jesus met with his disciples for supper, knowing that it would be the last time on Earth that he would dine with them, he gathered them together and said to them, "do this in remembrance of me." When we come together for Communion, we remember the work that Jesus took upon himself, willingly, for our sake. We remember that he did not withhold his services, asking whether or not we deserve his help. We remember that our very life's sustenance, what we eat and what we drink, is derived from God's grace. We remember Christ's call to active service of God's will....

The Boy Scouts who accept leadership roles within their troop find that they become better persons in the long run because of their willingness to serve. And in the same way, when we serve God, it is not merely for God's sake. The love that we pour out into service comes back to us twice over. Our lives become richer and more meaningful, and we avoid the quicksand of dull self-absorption that has drowned so many in contemporary culture. So, my advice to you,

next time you hear God's call, with or without the shaking of the thresholds, is to be brave, because someday you'll be glad you did.
Amen.