

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham

February 7, 2010

“You Can Do It”

Isaiah 6:1-8

Luke 5:1-11

I'm not sure you could find two people from scripture who were more different than the two we read about this morning, Isaiah and Peter. If you can picture the commercial with Shaquille O'Neil and Ben Stein talking about Comcast you get a sense of how different are Peter and Isaiah. Isaiah is a member of the aristocracy. He has access to kings and princes. He is highly educated and an amazing poet. He is at least a prophet if not a priest himself. He has disciples who record his every pronouncement. Peter on the other hand is a blue collar small business owner. He and his family have a small fishing business in the Galilee. He has not access to power and knows no one famous. Though he is probably literate he is not highly educated. He never has any disciples and little of what he said and did gets recorded for posterity. It would seem then that they have virtually nothing in common...yet their stories are inextricably intertwined. They are intertwined because each has a close encounter with God that changed their lives.

What is fascinating about their close encounters is that while the events could not be more different the results are almost identical. Isaiah has a Steven Spielbergesq encounter with smoke, loud voices and small singing winged creatures. It probably would have looked great in 3-D. Peter on the other hand has a Blue Collar Comedy Tour kind of encounter. Jesus has been in Peter's boat while Jesus has been preaching. While the preaching probably went well the fishing did not. Jesus tells Peter to put his net in on the other side of the boat...as if that will make any difference. But in so doing the catch of fish is beyond even imagining. Two very different encounters, yet with the same result. They each believe they are unworthy of the moment. Isaiah says, “Woe to me! I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips...” Peter says, “Go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man.” Each is afraid that their ordinariness, their less than perfect lives would make them fodder before the power of God. They are afraid of the consequences of encountering the power of the living God.

What happens next in these stories ought to surprise us, even if it no longer does. What happens is that God doesn't care that these two men are ordinary and less than perfect. God does not care that they are, in their own words, sinners. God has a mission for these two men and so God deals with their discomfort in ways that invite them into God's service. This turn of events ought to surprise us because many of us want to believe that God only uses practically perfect people to transform the world...not ordinary people like us. We look at ourselves in the mirror and think that we do not quite measure up to being a co-worker with Christ because of the failings and faults that we often keep secret within our souls or because some churchy person has said we don't measure up. We look at those robed people up front and think, “Hey I could never be as holy as they are.” So here is the thing, and the reason we have no robes on this

morning...it is to say that nobody gets an imperfect person pass to serving Christ. An imperfect person pass is the pass we give ourselves when we say, "Hey I'm not perfect so God can't use me so I am off the hook." We are making the point that the only difference between you and us is that we are ordinary people have been to seminary and have been given a particular task within the life of the church. There are in the end no perfect people to serve God...there are only us...ordinary people called to extraordinary missions.

There is no better place to remember this than at this table. All of us, all of us imperfect, ordinary people, are invited to sup together. We are invited in face because we are ordinary, less than perfect people. We are invited in order to be reminded of the amazing love that God has for us...and the amazing tasks to which Christ calls us. So this morning, as you take the elements here is what I would like you to say to yourself, "I can do it! I can make a difference for Christ in my world."