**Send Me**

**Isaiah 6:8**

The prophet Isaiah had just had an overwhelming encounter with the Divine Holy One. In the presence of God’s holiness, Isaiah naturally felt worthless and guilty. And who wouldn’t? His recognition and confession of sin – both his sins and those of his community – gave rise to an amazing act of forgiveness. Mere words were not enough to assure Isaiah of God’s forgiveness. One of the worship leaders, a seraph took a piece of hot coal from the altar and touched Isaiah’s lips, purging him of all uncleanliness. Isaiah was now able to wholeheartedly worship God and respond to God’s call in his life with commitment and passion.

As Isaiah worshiped, God issued a call to go and the prophet quietly responds, “Here I am, send me.” One of the significant things about this passage is that it happens in the context of worship. It is in worship that Isaiah, and we, can experience God’s presence in the liturgy - music, worship, prayer and sermon. A worship service that is designed to engage all of our senses, where we see, hear, taste, and even feel God’s presence can move us to respond to God’s call in our life. Worship, therefore, is closely tied to a life of service where one flows into the other.

In 2018, we celebrate 200 years of ministry with the Choctaws beginning first in Mississippi by a founding father of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church named Samuel King. Early in the life of the new church, Samuel King heard God’s call to go to the Choctaws with the good news of Jesus Christ. What started through King in 1818 in Mississippi, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church moved westward into Oklahoma as the Choctaw Nation was established. It has been a call that has had ups and downs; successes and failures; joys and tears. But that is how most calls go. This is what Isaiah discovered as he responded to God’s call to go. One never knows what God will do, or how God will work through an honest and willing response to “who will go for us?”

When Isaiah 6:8 is put into the context of the whole chapter we find that ministry is messy, confusing, and rarely easy. “Send me?” we might ask or say timidly. When we respond to God’s call we hope and pray that good will come of our efforts. We envision transformed lives, we hope for disciples, we pray that God will be glorified through our efforts. But that is not always the case. More often than not, words fall on deaf ears and actions go unnoticed. It can be discouraging work when we respond – “Here I am, send me.” The prophet Isaiah found this to be true. No doubt Samuel King and the early missionaries to the Choctaws struggled with discouragement. The reality is we never know how the Holy Spirit will use something that we may say or do for the Lord. What we think is failure, God will be able to bring something beautiful and useful out of it. Read the last verse in chapter 6 of Isaiah. There is mystery and hope found in verse 13. In the midst of destruction there is a holy seed in the remaining stump of the oak tree that has been laid to waste. The good news is that holy seed is in all God calls us to when we respond, “Send me.”

God calls every disciple to an important work – a missionary, a preacher, a Sunday school teacher, a volunteer at a shelter, a loyal friend to the friendless. Success is not our goal, but rather faithfulness. All God desires from us is a willing heart to respond, “send me.”