

Who, Me?
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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Isaiah 6:1-13

You've probably heard that sweet story of the little girl who wanted some time alone with her newborn baby brother. Her parents were hesitant at first to let her in the room alone with the baby, not knowing quite what she was thinking. Ultimately, they decided to let her, but they left the door cracked open a bit, so they could see and hear. The little girl walked up to the crib and said to her tiny new brother, *"Tell me about God. I'm starting to forget."*

That's our problem, too. We forget. It's part of the human condition. We get distracted, and miss the sacredness of a moment. Our minds are filled up with so many things – some of them important, many of them not. We're driven to distraction. And it shows up in a lot of ways.

There's never a convenient time to be called as a prophet. For Isaiah, that call came the year that King Uzziah of Judah died. The King had been a very good monarch for most of his 52 year reign, but then his pride got the better of him, and he tried to usurp the power of the priests in the temple by lighting the ceremonial incense.

Which seems funny to me, because I'm always thinking of ways to include other people to help me with worship!

Anyway, as the story goes, as soon as the King lit the incense, there was an earthquake that broke open the roof of the temple. The sun shining on the errant king's face caused him to have leprosy. And soon after, he died. Uzziah was followed with a couple of rather ineffective kings, Jotham and Ahaz, and the countries of Syria and Ephraim took notice and began to threaten war. Rather than listening to Isaiah, God's appointed prophet of the moment, King Ahaz takes advice from unreliable members of his cabinet.

So why all this historical background? To help us understand what God was calling Isaiah into! Not into an easy job. Scholars think Isaiah was a mid-level bureaucrat in the court of the kings of Judah. I imagine he was a good worker who just kept his head down and got the job done. No particular heroics, no stellar performances that single him out. Just a regular guy

trying to make a living and be good person by going to temple, performing the required sacrifices, saying the required prayers.

But suddenly, this mysterious vision is thrust upon him – the robes of the Holy One filling the temple, smoke and incense, angelic fiery beings, called seraphs with six wings, flying about... kinda scary!

Isaiah was not specially trained. His first response to the presence of the Divine was something like *"whoa, I am not worthy to be here....I'm not who you think I am....I'm not perfect or wise about this religious stuff...I observe the rules but I don't think I'm good enough for this faith in action. Not to mention, I'm a middle manager. I've made some iffy ethical choices in my time. I'm not so sure about this role and definitely don't feel worthy of it, I'm not perfect or holy enough to be here face to face with you, God."*

God simply reaches out in grace to the hesitant Isaiah....no shaming, no rhetoric, no dogma....just *"Here we can make you clean with just a touch....accept my grace and love....and let's get down to business....I need a prophet."*

"Oh! Oh, my!" responds Isaiah and after the touch of holy fire, *"Okay....I'll go! Send me!"*

And if the reading for the day stopped there, I think we'd all be OK. We'd leave this morning singing *"Here I am, Lord"* (which is incidentally the most popular hymn sung throughout Western Christendom).

If this text actually fit the lyrics properly it'd be something like:

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have seen fiery snake angels flying 'round. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will tell your people that they're screwed!

Because God sends Isaiah out with a message, not of tidings of great joy with peace on earth for all people... no, it is a message of destruction.

God said, *"Go and tell this people: "Listen hard, but you aren't going to get it; look hard, but you won't catch on.' Make these people blockheads, with fingers in their ears and blindfolds on their eyes, So they won't see a thing, won't hear a word, So they won't have a clue about what's going on and, yes, so they won't turn around and be made whole."*

Astonished, the prophet responds: *"And Master, how long is this to go on?"*

Until I, God, get rid of everyone, sending them off, the land totally empty. And even if some should survive, say a tenth, the devastation will start up

again. The country will look like a pine tree forest, with every tree cut down— Every tree a stump, a huge field of stumps. But there's a holy seed in those stumps."

Destruction! Total destruction! Let that soak in.

Who of us wants to take that type of message out into our world today?

I wonder if Isaiah might have added Barry McGuire's 1965 song, "Eve of Destruction" to his prophetic playlist?

"The eastern world, it is explodin', Violence flarin', bullets loadin', You're old enough to kill but not for votin', You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're totin', And even the Jordan River has bodies floatin', But you tell me over and over and over again my friend, Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction."

It seems, like the people who originally heard God's message from Isaiah, we are still teetering on the "eve of destruction". It seems our hearing and eyesight and mental comprehension haven't improved much, and we're doing a good job of laying waste to our land and its people. We have stopped listening and seeing each other, and in doing so, we are not listening to or seeing God in each other.

It's the time of year when farmers have plowed under the remnants of their crops. Gardeners have pulled up the last of their vegetable stocks and cutting the perennials to the ground. Arborists have pruned the bushes and trees that needed trimming.

Each in their own way, laying waste to once was bountiful and full of beauty and life. Destruction! Yes, but only in preparation for the new creation to come.

God's last words to the people today are not about destruction and death, but rather, life. Listen to the final words of God: *"The holy seed is its stump."*

What is the role of destruction in creation? The seasons of the year know the answer. For those of you who farm or garden, you know the answer too.

So do we, as the people of God. We tell about it beginning in Advent when everything seems so dark, and hopeless, we cling to a holy seed called hope which grows from that stump.

Amen.