

As I've listened to people over the years talking about their faith, many have told me how they sense those gentle nudges from God, that sense of stirring within themselves that prompts them to follow a path that God has offered to them. Maybe you have experienced such a feeling. Sometimes we name this as a call from God, an invitation, or a mission for life. Whether it's making a change in one's profession, beginning a new relationship, or finding a creative way to help those in need, God often nudges us to try new things.

Many of us, however, often respond, "Who? Me? Why would you ask me, God, of all people? Certainly, there are more qualified people than me. Are you sure you got the right person, God?"

Sometimes when we hear that gentle voice, that tugging within us, we may try to ignore call, as was the case with

an elderly man [while] taking his evening walk. He was enjoying the crisp night air and the sound of the wind blowing through the trees when, suddenly, he heard a little voice calling, "Help me! Help me!"

The man looked all around and saw no one, so he continued his walk. Again, he heard the tiny little voice. "Help me! Help me!"

This time he looked down and saw a small frog. He gently lifted the frog and looked at it intently. The frog spoke: "I'm really a beautiful young princess. If you will kiss me, I will turn back into a princess and I will love you forever."

["Who? Me?" the man replied.] He thought for a moment, placed the frog in his top pocket, and continued walking. The little frog looked up out of the pocket and asked, "Why don't you kiss me?"

The man responded, "Frankly, at this stage in my life, I would rather have a talking frog."¹

The prophet Isaiah, of course, did not encounter a talking frog, but his experience must have seemed just as surreal. In a dreamlike state of mind, he had a vision of God sitting on a throne, complete with seraphs in attendance. The Hebrew word *seraph* literally means "a fiery one," and they each had six wings. Some have interpreted these to be angelic beings, messengers from God, for one called to another,

Holy, holy, holy
is the LORD of heavenly forces!
All the earth
is filled with God's glory!²

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If I experienced this kind of dream, I might wonder if it was a nightmare, for smoke filled the room, and the voices began to shake the entire structure. These special effects might unnerve many of us.

Isaiah also must have felt the magnitude of this experience, for he cried out, “‘I’m doomed! Everything I say is sinful, and so are the words of everyone around me.”³ He wondered how he could even enter into God’s presence. How could an ordinary guy be in the presence of the awesome nature of God?

Have you ever wondered that about yourself? Why God might invite you to help someone when you feel stressed yourself? Maybe you have felt a gentle nudge to listen to someone who needs comforting when your own life seems in chaos. I imagine many of us have uttered the phrase, “Who? Me? You must have the wrong number, God. Try calling someone else.”

Especially now. In a pandemic that seems to get worse every day. When our awareness of racism has been heightened. When our President seems bent

on making the transition to new leadership as difficult as possible. When the number of people dying from COVID-19 is on the rise and we’re being asked to lock down our lives once again.

Can it get any worse? Has anyone ever faced such chaos?

Isaiah would suggest that those living in his time faced a time as unpredictable as ours. Did you notice how Isaiah began telling about his vision: “In the year King Uzziah died.” That may not mean much to our ears today, for King Uzziah ruled seven and a half centuries before the days of Jesus. This leader wasn’t perfect, but as one writer noted, “Uzziah conquered the Philistines and the Arabians, and received tribute from the Ammonites; he refortified his country, reorganized and reequipped his army, and personally engaged in agricultural pursuits. His success as king, administrator, and commander-in-chief of the army made him ruler over the largest realm of Judah since the disruption of the kingdom.”⁴

As Isaiah begins telling of his vision, this great King Uzziah who ruled for five decades had just died. The Assyrian army was on the horizon “with advanced

weaponry, massive economic support, and... psychological warfare. In contrast, Jerusalem was a city with hastily erected defenses filled with refugees from the countryside and other captured cities.”⁵

One writer noted that Uzziah’s “death naturally evokes questions regarding stability and royal succession.”⁶

Sound familiar? We are in a period of transition of leadership in our nation, a normally peaceful process that is in dispute. We are in a war with a tiny virus that kills more people each day. The details of our lives differ from Isaiah, but in many ways, our chaos is remarkably similar.

Amid all this uncertainty, Isaiah felt inadequate to do much of anything. In his vision his lips were purified by a burning coal, preparing him to bring words of hope. When he heard a voice asking,

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah replied, “Here am I; send me!”⁷

Isaiah met with the new king and offered him a word of hope: “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”⁸

Through something as ordinary as the birth of a child, Isaiah offered a reminder of life, and centuries later the church heard these words as they celebrated the birth of Jesus—a celebration we will soon begin once again. The name Immanuel means “God with us.” Wars, chaos, pandemics, and political squabbles have been happening throughout history, and in these times, God remains with us, striving to help us find a way through the chaos. In these times, God invites each of us to bring words of hope to those around us. “Who? Me?” you might ask. Yes. You.

¹ Hodgin, Michael; *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #78.

² Isaiah 6:3, CEB.

³ Isaiah 6:5, CEV.

⁴ www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14622-uzziah

⁵ www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/god-calls-isaiah/48645

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Isaiah 6:8, NRSV.

⁸ Isaiah 6:14.