

What's the Point?
Rev. Dr. Meagan Boozer

There are certain things that happen to us in our lives that change our lives, that change the way we look at life, that change the direction of our lives. Some of those things are really hard, tragic things and some of those things are really good, joyful things. And we all have pictures in our minds of all of the above. As I began to compile this sermon in my head last week, I was thinking about the pictures we have in our minds that are connected to the hard times and the good times we've been through. And the first picture that came to my mind was from Christmas Day 1983 when my family was gathered around the Christmas tree at my mom's house, 11 of us at the time, and we all heard a quick popping sound, and the next thing we knew the Christmas tree was on fire. The fire shot up those dry needles, caught the ceiling on fire (she lived in an old house that had wallpapered ceilings), and chunks of the paper were falling on the furniture as we were running out the door – running over to our neighbor's house on an icy, snowy day, screaming and crying while the fire trucks were pulling into the driveway. My mom was out of her house for over a year while everything was repaired and rebuilt. I can see all of that in my mind...but the image that first came to me as I thought about this sermon was the picture of my dad, who lived in Amberson for 30+ years after my parent's divorce when I was 10. Someone had called dad, letting him know what was happening and he must have made record time on the mountain getting to Chambersburg that day. We were back outside at the time when he arrived, and I can see my dad running towards his (now adult children), arms outstretched, and us running towards him. Literally, after years of a nasty divorce and what felt like paternal abandonment, that picture on one of the worst days is something I'm so glad I can't unsee. I can't unsee it. It's right here (in my mind and heart) and it brings comfort to me.

The prophet Isaiah, 700 years before the birth of Christ, had many things, many images God showed him that he could not unsee – with the most amazing one being both terrifying and comforting at the same time. It was an image, a vision that the people around him needed to see, too – because they were wondering, "Where is God?" "Why won't he help us?" as they saw the society around them becoming more and more godless and also saw the hypocrisy of the 'religious.'

In a world in which we are tempted to think that if only the right person would get elected to office, then everything will be okay, or if the right person isn't elected, we are doomed.... we need to see what Isaiah saw. And, dare I say, in a world where we are tempted to think that God is really blessed to have people like us on his side, we need to see ourselves as Isaiah saw himself.

In our call to worship we read Isaiah 6:1-8. Let's look at it again. *"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. ²Seraphs 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. ³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And 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!" ⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The 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." ⁸Then 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!"*

King Uzziah was the only king Isaiah had known at this point in his young life, and so there was great anxiety about what the future would hold, based on who the next king would be. We can understand this with what we consider such crucial elections in our country lately, can't we? How much anxiety did we see (and still see) over the midterm elections? So, Isaiah and his

people were feeling anxious because King Uzziah had died. And God gave Isaiah a vision, a picture of something he could not see. During what was a hard time, God gave him something to grab hold of that could not be taken away – and it changed his life and brought great comfort to his soul.

In this vision he saw that the real King was not dead! When Isaiah caught a glimpse of the real King, all of his uncertain circumstances looked different. This holy King was not bound by time and space. This holy, other than, greater than, purer than, wiser than, more powerful King was not just a king over a little stretch of land called Israel or Judah, the whole earth is full of His Glory! And this vision that Isaiah was given put him flat on his face. He saw, and he was changed. He was wrung out by an awareness of his own unholiness. *“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!”* In the presence of the real King, the King over all the earth, he realized that he deserved to be destroyed by the wrath of God. He was acutely aware of his own unworthiness, his own sinfulness. He was overcome by guilt and shame, on his face before the perfect holiness of the King of kings! And then the seraph came, in his vision, and cleansed him, cleansed his lips, saying to him, “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” No more guilt. You are forgiven. Get up. There’s work to do! Who will go for us to do this work? And Isaiah answered, “Me! Me! Send me!” Why? Because once we know in the depths of our soul that our guilt has been taken away through the merciful forgiveness of our sins, we can’t keep that to ourselves! We don’t just want to, we need to share it wherever God sends us!

Throughout the rest of *Isaiah* we have pictures of the one who is the King - little by little revealing the fullness of the one Promised to save us and bring us back to God since the fall of Adam & Eve. Here are some of the earliest pictures in the book of Isaiah. First, after giving a picture of the destruction that would come, we read:

† Isaiah 6:13, *“But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”*

† Isaiah 11:1-2, *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”*

Even though Judah was going to be conquered by the Assyrians, God is promising that a branch would shoot out from one of the trees mowed down – the family tree of Jesse, who was King David’s father, from whom would come the promised Savior. When the people were wondering, “Where is God?” “Why won’t He help us?” Isaiah could see that God had not forgotten his promise. His challenge was to get the message out to the people who had stopped believing that God would ever come and make things right again.

This is our challenge, too. Isaiah could have experienced the vision and kept it to himself. Or he could have shared it with some of his family members and closest friends. Maybe he might even have gathered those family members and friends together once or twice a week to thank God and pray and sing songs of praise to Him. But God asked him, “Who will go for us?” “Who will tell others about the coming King?” And Isaiah said, “Here I am. Send me.”

God is still asking the question, “Who will go for us?” “Who will tell others about the coming King?” And we might respond by saying something like, “Well, we are here every Sunday, churches all over are gathered together in worship, anyone is welcome. All they have to do is come and we’ll do our part being friendly and helping them figure out how to be part of a church family.” But let’s look again at what God asked in the vision he gave Isaiah. “Who will go for us?” Not, “Who will come to us?” “Who will GO for us?”

Who will go out to school, to your places of work, to the restaurant, to the post offices, to the Dollar General, to the Market, up to hang out at Hammonds or Gambles, or to the basketball games, or wherever you usually go – who will go into these places as one commissioned by God to go for Him? Who will go for us – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Who will go for us? Who won’t be afraid to openly and honestly speak of the difference the King over all kings, the King of your heart, has made in your life - the One who has come & comforted your guilty soul?

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came to destroy the works of the devil (which is to keep the lost, lost, apart from God). And the means he chose to do these things was through this living, supernatural body of Christ on earth called the Church! Remember this encounter between Jesus and his disciples (Matthew 16:13-18), *“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ ‘They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ ‘Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ ‘Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ‘And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.’”*

The church was built, is still being built, and will continue to be built on the bold professions of faith of God’s people – declaring that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Promised One, the Son of the Living God – who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, who lived a sinless life, who died a sacrificial death, who rose from the dead to open the way to heaven for you and me, and who will one day come again and make all things new. The true Church is grounded in those declarations, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it! But deeply imbedded in those declarations, folks, is the question, “Who will go for us so that the Church will continue to be built?” “Who will go for us to continue Jesus’ work of seeking and saving the lost?” Who will go to the people around them, in a now secular culture (this is not the 1950’s when a large majority of the American population were church-going people)? Projections show that by 2025, 50% of the United States will be secularists – meaning they are pragmatic atheists. They have no faith in God because they do not even think of God. They have no need for God because they do not even think of God. They have no guilt about how they are living because they have no biblical foundation that gives them a universal right or wrong. They certainly don’t go to church because why would you do that if you don’t have God on your radar? And to all this, we are called to ‘Go!’

What is the point of all this? What has been the point of all our pointing to Jesus in sermon after sermon based on Genesis, the minor prophets, and in the fall thinking about how our lives point to Jesus in the way we raise our children & youth, the way we invest and manage our time, the words we say and don’t say, the friends & the marriage partner we choose, the way we pray, the ways that we serve our church family, and the way we view and distribute the money God provides for us.... What has been the point of all our pointing?

The point is what Isaiah saw. The point is the end. The point is seeing the Lord, high and lifted up, with the whole earth full of his glory, surrounded by people who are free from guilt, free from shame, and full of awestruck wonder and gratitude because of the forgiveness that is theirs! The point is the end, folks. And though my faith in Jesus Christ secures *my* end, I know so many others who don’t have that security, who think only that the end of this life is the end, period, or who think that if you’re more good than bad, even without faith in Jesus, you’ll end up in a good place rather than a bad place! We must never forget that one day the doors are going to close on this ark. We must never forget that our goal is not to make ‘our church’ the coziest, comfiest, most inspiring place to be because it ministers to our souls – our goal is to make this the messiest yet most inspiring place to be because God is adding to His number DAILY those who are being saved!!!! Adding people to the family who have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light!

So, as we get ready to experience Advent and Christmas together, let me remind us that Christmas for Christ followers is not about getting the right gift. Christmas for Christ followers is about giving the only gift that matters in the end. Our goal as a church family over the next month is to depopulate satan’s zipcode. This means that we ramp up our prayers for people around us at school, at work, in casual places of gathering like the restaurant, like the Legion, or like the Fannettsburg Inn.... There’s nothing wrong with going to those places as long as you’re remembering the goal and can keep your body, your mind, and your spirit from falling into sin.

In the days of the Old Testament, God was constantly calling his people to purity. He was calling them to live perfect lives, to remain separate from foreigners, to offer pure sacrifices, etc. In essence, God called them to focus inward. Focus inward. Keep yourself and your nation pure. But, apart from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who lifted the burden of their sin, they couldn't do it. Apart from the living, breathing work of the Holy Spirit they couldn't do it. But after Jesus came, after he did the purifying work for them, the focus turned from an inward focus to an outward focus. Jesus told us to "Go!" Jesus went to all sorts of places the 'religious people' thought he shouldn't go. He said to go to all people, all nations, all ethnicities, all places, tribes, and tongues and tell the world that the Savior has come, the Messiah has come, the true King above all kings has already come – and he will come again one day to bring all his people home.

Some, if not all of us, have family members who don't come to church with us. Some used to, but haven't come in years. And we have stopped asking them. It's time to start again. It's time to start again. First, we pray. Then we pray some more. Then we say something like this (without guilt), "It would mean a lot to me if you would come to church with me this month of Christmas." That's a lot different than saying, "You need to get to church." "Please, please, please come to church." Put it on yourself. "It would mean a lot to me if you would come to church with me over Christmas." How many of us have family members who never come? Then we must go. We must go. "Who will go for us?" God asks. "Here I am. Send me." Who better person than one who is already in a relationship with your family member or friend?

And our part, gathered church, is to make sure we greet without guilt. Greet without guilt. No pushing. No probing. Our job is not to lay guilt on people even in some joking sort of way. That doesn't work. I remember my mom attending a church service when I preached my first sermon at Falling Spring. She had stopped attending church when she and my dad got divorced and never returned as a regular part of the church family. I heard later that a friend of my mom's saw her coming up the walkway that morning and went to the outside stone walls of the church, put his arms out, and said, "I'll hold the walls up! Molly's coming!" That may sound funny to some, but I'm sure it hurt. It hurt me to hear it later. Our job is to welcome all whom God brings without guilt, with grateful hearts, keeping a vision in our heads and in our hearts of the end – praying that more and more people will find their lives changed by finding their eternal comfort and comforter as they come to know and love the great King above all kings!

I want everyone to stand up and face inward. Face the center of the sanctuary. Now, I want everyone to turn and face the outside walls. That's where our focus needs to be, all the time, but especially as we move into Advent and Christmas – because often people's hearts are softened already to the message of hope, peace, joy, and love. After all we've been given, how can we possibly allow fear or apathy or anything else to keep us from sharing freely the truth of the coming King?

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, Gracious Lord, hear our prayer. Give us, we pray, a vision of a world in desperate need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Give us a heart that yearns to share your good news. Give us a gentle yet persistent boldness to continue your work of seeking and saving the lost. Grant that we may be so filled with an awareness of our own desperate need for you, and a great sense of gratitude and relief for your forgiveness, that we can do no less than say, "Here we are. Send us," trusting in the partnership of the Holy Spirit in all that we do and say. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*