

Sermon for Sunday, May 27, 2018 - “From ‘Woe Is Me’ to ‘Send Me’”

Holy Trinity Sunday
May 27, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of our Triune God.

“Woe is me,” says the prophet Isaiah in our first reading today; “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.”

These days we sometimes say, “woe is me” in a mocking way, “oh woe is me my life is so hard”, but for Isaiah these words are a real lament. As Isaiah considers his own life and the state of his country he is overcome with guilt, shame and sorrow. Anyone relate to that?

In Isaiah’s time, the people have forgotten and forsaken God, they engage in futile worship, their leaders are corrupt and greed has led to injustice. Sound familiar?

Woe is me for I have unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips. Just be thankful, dear prophet Isaiah, that you lived before talk radio, cable news and social media.

This week I traveled to Washington, DC, for a preaching conference. I am rather obsessed with getting to the airport early after some bad experiences. On Monday, I took that a little far and was at the boarding gate by 4:30 a.m. for a 7:00 a.m. flight. Needless to say, my friend and I were the only people at the gate area for quite a while which meant there was no other noise to drown out the cable news shows blaring on the TVs overhead. CNN and FOX news were battling it out right there at Gate E6 before the sun rose. Let’s just say “woe is me” was not the only utterance that crossed my unclean lips that morning as I lamented living among a people of unclean lips.

The vehemence, the vitriol, the hatred spewed out all around us, all the time, by our own lips, by people and leaders who profess to be Christian while advancing their own agenda - it is all really just too much. Woe is me. Woe is our world.

Yet Isaiah’s story doesn’t end with woe is me, it ends with him saying, “Send me”. How do we move from woe is me to send me? That was the question I was asked to consider again and again this week at the preaching conference right in the heart of our nation’s capital.

Many of the events were held at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. Security to enter the building was really tight after the 2016 shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, a somber reminder.

But once we got inside, things were anything but somber.

I went through two full packs of Kleenex as preacher after preacher convicted and uplifted us. One preacher was Bishop Yvette Flunder, a black lesbian woman who is actively working for justice all the time. She acknowledged the woe is me mentality that is so prevalent among us today. But she pushed back. "There's too much lament, anxiety, worry, grief, anger, sorrow, despair, she said. There's not enough dancing. It takes faith to dance in a time like this. You don't have to wait for the battle to be over. You can dance now. You know how the battle ends." She got a whole bunch of white mainline preachers to get up and join our black colleagues in dancing and praising God. Perhaps even more remarkable, she and so many of the preachers this week renewed our hope.

Then Thursday night we got to be with some of the most respected elders of the Christian faith as they lead a prayer vigil called Reclaiming Jesus. Elders like Michael Curry of royal wedding fame, Catholic contemplative Richard Rohr, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, and Evangelical leaders Tony Campolo and Jim Wallis are among a diverse group of Christian leaders seeking to Reclaim Jesus. These leaders gathered for a prayer retreat this spring amid their concerns about the soul of our nation and the integrity of the Christian faith. They issued a powerful statement that I encourage you to read at the website <http://www.reclaimingjesus.org> I'll share it this week.

These elders also called for Christians to gather this week for a prayer service and a silent prayer vigil at the White House. Many of the 1700 preachers gathered for the conference showed up. Many, many other people from a wide range of Christian denominations and political perspectives did as well. Republicans, Democrats, progressives and conservatives came together. We prayed and sang and then walked silently together through the streets of DC, seeking to reclaim the name of Jesus for the sake of our nation and our Christian witness. It was one of the most powerful experiences of the body of Christ that I have ever experienced. It moved me from woe is me to send me.

Woe is me. Woe is our world.

Yes - But even greater is God's glory. Even greater is the voice of our triune God calling all creation into being, speaking forgiveness for a world gone mad, praying for us with sighs too deep for words. Even greater is God's victory over sin and death.

God gives Isaiah what he needs - a live coal to clean his lips. His guilt departs from him; his sin is blotted out. Then Isaiah, who has said, "Woe is me", can say, "Here I am, send me."

Each week as we gather, God gives us what we need to move from woe is me, to send me. We hear powerful words of scripture read, interpreted and prayed in ways that open our hearts. We join God's people, all the hosts of heaven including seraphim and cherubim in singing holy, holy, holy just as they did in Isaiah's vision. We hear words of forgiveness as Jesus feeds us and cleanses our lips.

We are transformed by the Triune God: adopted by the Father, freed by the Son, empowered by the Spirit. We have what we need to hope, to dance, to speak in ways that uplift and set others free, to go forth and serve.

Here we are God, send us.

