

Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon for 9th February 2025 the 5th Sunday after Epiphany

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:9-11 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Called to Follow

Do you realize that you are sitting the presence of God? How does that make you feel? Do you feel blessed that God allows you to be in his presence? Do you feel unworthy?

In all the years I've been attending church, I haven't had the experience of Isaiah where he saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne and the train of his robe filled the temple where six winged seraphim are flying around worshipping and serving the Lord on his throne. These Seraphim would have a fiery or radiant appearance, as that's what Seraph means, fiery ones. These six-winged angelic creatures continually attend God at His throne.

Each set of the seraphim's wings serves a different purpose; one set covers the face, perhaps as protection from the radiance of God's glory and in awe of being in God's presence. Another set of wings is used for flying, to aid in their swift servitude of God, and the third set is used to cover the seraphim's feet so that they can humbly conceal their unworthiness, while in God's holy presence. At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke as they sang, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

All this led to Isaiah's awareness of his unworthiness as he was in awe yet afraid of being in God's presence. "Woe to me!" Isaiah cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.

Being in God's presence, in awe of God's holiness and aware of the words that had passed through his lips as unclean, Isaiah was afraid. Upon hearing Isaiah's confession, one of the seraphim removed a live coal from the altar of God, touched Isaiah's mouth with it, and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And he said, "Here am I. Send me!"

In Acts 9, you can read of the spectacular event where Paul was on his way to Damascus and was blinded by a sudden light from heaven, as he fell to the ground, he heard the voice of Jesus, Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me.

When Lord even called Ananias in a vision, Ananias said, here I am. The Lord asked Ananias to lay his hands on Saul in order for him to receive his sight. When Ananias queried about how Saul persecuted the church, the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Therefore, in 1 Corinthians 15:9, the apostle Paul wrote, For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Then in the gospel reading for today, we heard where, the fishermen have fished all night and haven't caught a thing. They're on the shore washing their nets when Jesus comes along, and because the people crowded around him, Jesus got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon Peter, and asked him to put out a little from shore and after he further taught the people from the boat, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Even though Peter felt perhaps exhausted and deflated from trying all night, he did what Jesus asked, and what happened? They caught so many fish that their nets began to break.

When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

In all of the readings today, none of the people felt worthy to be called. They all recognised they were sinners. Did that deter God? Did God expect people to be perfect before they could do his work. No, he didn't. What God did was purify and prepare those he chose for ministry.

A couple weeks ago we reflected on how we are all one body, working together with different gifts and talents. What is the spiritual gift God has blessed you with to serve his body the church.

Do you feel unworthy to be called by God to work for him?

Do you think God is deterred at our excuses?

When God calls, you can't use the excuse that you are unworthy. Because even though we know we are sinful from unclean words which come from our mouths, from our sinful thoughts and our sinful actions, God has done something about it. It's what Paul passed onto us as first importance. That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and appeared to his disciples.

Therefore you can't use the excuse you are unworthy because already through baptism, you are joined to Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. Remember Jesus came to offer a baptism of water and fire. Just as the purifying fire cleansed the lips of Isaiah, you have been cleansed by the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit. Now that God has made you worthy, what is stopping you from following him, in worship and service as the seraphim did.

When God calls, it changes your life.

Isaiah's life was changed, Paul's life was changed, Peter and the other disciple's life changed. How has your life changed from being a follower of Jesus. Paul wrote, by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

What effect has God's grace to you had on your life? What affect has the gospel of Jesus had on your life. For Paul, it is the scriptures that contain the gospel on which the church stands, otherwise our preaching is in vain. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised from the dead, and he appeared to his disciples.

Jesus then called certain men to follow him. He created a community of disciples who heard him preach and teach, heal, and finally suffer, die, and rise from death on the first Easter.

Paul considers himself the least of the apostles, and yet God used him bring many people to faith in Jesus. Paul taught the true Christian church must follow Jesus who came into the world and was baptised taking on the sins of the world, in order to save us from our sins.

So, what does that mean to you, who may consider I am not worthy enough, I am the least important. Know, that is a good place for Jesus to start with. Because Jesus can mould and shape you into the servant he wants of you.

Following Jesus involves firstly to listen to him, to have faith in him, to know who he is. To follow Jesus involves acknowledging your unworthiness yet being in awe of how he makes you worthy. Be open to how God may call you in some spectacular way to do ministry for him that the world might come to believe. Amen