

Ordination Service 2013

Mthatha

22 September 2013

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 12: 1-17; John 21: 1-17.

Hymn: IsiXhosa 18

Text: Isaiah 6: 8 – 9 a

Then 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.” He said, “Go...”

Title **The enabling encounter with the sending God**

God Reveals! God Enables! God sends!

I greet you warmly in the name of the Crucified Messiah, Risen Lord and the Ascended Saviour Jesus Christ. We rejoice with you today that you responded to God’s call on your lives and have successfully journeyed through all the years of preparation until this day of ordination. Be assured of the prayers and support of the people called Methodists as well as the whole Christian community as you take up the available opportunities to exercise your calling in the Church of Christ. On behalf of the MCSA, I hereby extend a word of gratitude to all those who contributed to your journey; the EMMU Staff, the congregations, your families and all the Methodist people. Allow me to reflect with you on the 6th chapter of the Book of Isaiah.

1. God meets Isaiah – The Encounter

The place is the temple and the occasion is a Great Religious Festival in which Isaiah was a participant. The context is the year of the death of King Uzziah. It is very interesting that Isaiah in this personal memoir should date this experience to the year of Uzziah’s death. Uzziah was a prominent King who had ruled for 52 years from the age of 16. Notice should be taken of the reference to his mother, Jecoliah as well as his wife in the 26th Chapter of the book of 2nd Chronicles. The reign of this King must have been so good that even women were noticed and given some prominence, given the context of the time. It is further recorded that God had given him success and he did what was right in the eyes of God.

At some point *pride* crept in and it led to his downfall. He became unfaithful to God and even disobeyed God and in arrogance chose to walk into the temple to burn incense which

was to be done only by the priests. When advised not to do so, he became angry. This led to him being struck by leprosy till death.

Pride is a **killer**. It is a secret enemy that comes unnoticed and it invaded both the heart and head of Uzziah. Uzziah did not pay attention to the visit of pride until it dealt him a fatal blow. It killed intimacy with God; killed fear of God; blew his ego out of proportion. His ego became so big that it blinded him from recognising the true source of power. His loss of spiritual sight infected the whole nation. Trust was shifted from God and security was sought from other sources. The behaviour of a leader influences the people for better or for worse; it is infectious. My dear friends – be alert!

In the year of Uzziah's death, Isaiah remembers – God revealed Himself and he writes; "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted..." Of course God has to seat high and exalted on the throne of our lives. In the context of rebellion against God, disobedience and in the context of seeking security from other sources other than God – Isaiah experiences the revelation of God taking His rightful place. He must have come to the festival carrying the trauma, confusion of what was taking place in his nation. In the middle of the festival, Isaiah sees another worship service taking place – the choir of seraphs worshipping God:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."

God's presence became real. All their best worship was nothing when compared to the splendour of the revelation of God's presence – the encounter.

2. God enables him

The encounter became a mirror for Isaiah. He saw himself as he was. He was enabled to see his **real** self. Isaiah found himself. It is tragic when a person is not able to find himself or herself. The tragedy is that the person does not see that he/she is lost and keeps on going until he/she gets to a fatal destination. As Isaiah found himself, he went to *his knees* and took his trauma to God. He confessed that his lips and those of his people were unclean. He cried to God and did so not only for himself alone, but for his people as well. As he cried, there was a swift response – Gods forgiving and healing action kicked in immediately. One of the seraphs flew to him and touched his mouth with a burning coal and said; "See this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for."

The sovereign act of divine grace takes away the weight of guilt. There was no need to carry it any longer. He experienced forgiveness and the blotting out of his sin by the enabling touch of God. Guilt as well as an unforgiving spirit puts a heavy load on us. We are in the business of being forgiven and to offer forgiveness and sharing the good news of the forgiving love of God. Friends we have to learn to forgive. We have to reflect on being forgiven, Sometimes it is difficult to forgive. There are moments when those who have wronged us "resist leaving our hearts." In moments like those we have to take the process to God – who is able to take the load off. I am not suggesting that those who have wronged

us must not face the consequences of their actions which in some instances continue unabated. Of course they must be stopped, but at the same time they must get out of our hearts. The journey is long and we cannot afford to be carrying weights of un-forgiveness and guilt. The experience of both being forgiven and forgiving will make us walk through this journey lighter.

3. The sending

After Isaiah was forgiven, he heard a voice. The connecting word in verse 8 is **then**. “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Note that it is not recorded that God called Isaiah by name nor did God plead with Isaiah and say ‘please will you go for us.’ Instead Isaiah hears the conversation and the conversation leads to his response. He hears the lament – and offers himself. There is no search and selection. Instead there is conversation which is marked by the plural in the question; “Who will go for US? Isaiah over-hears the conversation. The encounter has enabled him to hear the conversation and offers him an opportunity to participate.

As you come to this stage of your journey, the church affirms you, accepts that you have **heard**. We further believe that you are able to listen. By act of ordination and reception into Connexion, we are saying to you; keep on listening to the conversation. There is no graduation. You continue to be **learners** in the school of Christ.

The call is a response to God’s conversation about God’s creation and people. It is about seeing what hurts the heart of God and committing to follow God in what God is doing in God’s world:

- It is not about opening “spaza” shops, but it is about touching the world that God so loved and that Christ died to redeem.
- Go into the world and follow what God is doing. As you do so, don’t turn the existing churches into franchises and make yourselves owners. The Church belongs to God and the Church is not ours, but it is us. In the opening address I made reference to the WCC’s Port Alegre statement: “Each church is the church catholic, but not the whole of it. Each church fulfils its catholicity when it is in communion with other churches.” It is not a franchise which is individually owned.

Without experiencing the transforming encounter with God you run the risk of wanting to be the owner. In John Chapter 10 Jesus refers to Himself as the owner of the sheep. He says in John 10: 11-16 that the hired hand has a temporary interest in the sheep, but the owner puts His life down for the sheep. The hired hand abandons the sheep when the going gets tough. He sees the wolf coming and runs away. But the owner of the sheep gives his life for the sheep, and those who follow the owner make the commitment as verbalised in the hymn 400 of Frances Ridley Havergal (1836 – 1879):

“Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord to Thee. Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise...” A whole is life given for the cause.

As you go into the waiting world:

- Seek always to be transformed and transforming disciples – learn from Jesus.
- Work on your character and follow Him who is able to grow you in Christ likeness
- Listen to God and hear God’s sobs for the world – listen carefully so that you do not miss the conversation.
- Jealously guard your relationship with God – seek to continuously experience the touch of the divine mercy. Hear the call over and over again. It’s not a once off!
- Know that there is darkness of poverty and corruption – but GO!
- Go being aware of the violence and abuse and do not turn a blind eye – GO!
- Go mindful of threats of genocide, xenophobia, racism and tribalism – GO!
- Go, knowing there is growing of harmful practices like pornography and others – GO!

As you GO, you don’t walk alone. Know that God’s hand is ever extended towards you and waiting to take your hand. AMEN.