

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I will tell you right off. When I started preparing for this message and saw today's scripture readings, I hit the wall. Stopped cold in my tracks. Why?

Because an understanding was hidden from me...wondering what they mean?

No, because there is too much here. They are each so rich.

We tend to run through these readings, so take the bulletin home and re-read it.

Look at Isaiah. And we wonder why Isaiah is considered a major prophet? God used Isaiah to deliver some of the most encouraging and challenging messages in all of scripture. And none are more incredible than those to his servant Israel, his suffering servant. Listen again as he declares how "the promised one" was called from his mother's womb:

**"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept."**

What?? Too small a thing to just restore Israel? Are you serious? Like that is not enough??

**"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."**

Well, how is **that**? What a call that is! What a promise! That the servant of God should not only reach out to God's own people, but to the whole world. That the servant of God should not only bring light to the children of Israel, the light of hope and vindication and wholeness. But that the servant of God should bring it all nations. A call to the whole people of Israel, and a promise about one person, one child of Jacob.

And this one person, this servant, this one we call Jesus. Emmanuel. This one whose name means God Saves, God is With Us. This light to the nations, tells us in the same way...he is, so we are. And so we should be. To show all people the presence of the all-present kingdom of God.

Uh huh.

"Well..." We start thinking to ourselves, "That is a **mighty** tall order." Ahhh...in fact, that is a MAJOR burden!!! If good ol' Father Jim is all fired up and wants to go riding off into the sunset, I'm all good with a big, "Atta Boy" and a Hi-Ho Silver as the Long Ranger! Our older folks know what I mean by that.

A call like that, proclaimed in Isaiah, seems overwhelming to you and me. Wow...we just got Jesus baptized in last week's lessons, and now he wants himself and us to carry the world on our backs!?

Many of us feel that we are not up to it, that somehow we are not well shaped or well designed enough to give off the right kind of light. That for one reason or another we are not the ones for this particular calling... that it is really meant for someone else, for specialists like the priest, or that woman who reads her bible all the time, or that guy in the choir.

We have a tough enough time praying and doing those good things we ought to do.

Without having to be someone like John the Baptist, calling out to everyone in sight, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world".

Or someone like Andrew who bothers his brother Peter with the words: "I have found the Messiah". Like the guy who knocks on our door Saturday mornings, or fellow at work who always says a quiet grace before eating his lunch.

Most people, including some here today, feel inadequate most of the time...inadequate and afraid.

Maybe that is why people try to prove to themselves that they are OK. Trying to be the world's best parent, or best golfer, or best whatever. And so many are afraid that they are not, despite all that trying, all that work. So much energy for such little return.

And what for? So what?

To our inadequacies and to our fears. No matter how well hidden, or how up front they may be, the prophet Isaiah says. Jesus says. God says. Over and over and over again, throughout scripture and across all time to all of humanity:

**"I have faith in you."**

Think about it.

Going back to the Isaiah reading, it says, "I **will** also make you a light for the Gentiles". Not I **might**. Or I **should**.

God says, in effect, "I believe in you." I have faith in you...by you having faith in me and in my love for you. I give you everything. For you, I give the Word brought to you in living flesh and blood, to be present with you in all the ways that life is lived. For the tough times that bring tears and anguish. For the lonely and painful times that shake one into deepest grief and sadness. For the highest and most joyful of times as well, when tears of blessedness and intense joy and deepest healing are shed to bring us within the very gaze of heaven here on earth...all because I am the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, giving you gift upon gift so that you may be all that I have made you to be.

When that seems a far-off stretch, we move straight on into the gospel stories of Jesus...beginning with the one today. With the account of the testimony that John the Baptist makes about Jesus, and those that were called...immediately...into finding their spiritual home, so to speak.

How Andrew first visited with Jesus. Andrew...who was following John the Baptist, but then seemingly wastes no time changing gears, follows Jesus for a few hours, and tells his brother Simon Peter the next day, "We have found the Messiah." There is NO messing around by Andrew and his proclamation. And it goes on. Were the others any different from you or I? Do you think they felt any less adequate or afraid than we do?

Consider the ones Jesus chose to be his disciples. The ones who were to teach his ways later on. Were they extraordinary? They were not even ordinary! Some were outcasts, of questionable character to many of the religious folks of the day, like Matthew the tax collector. Others were poor. Uneducated, hard-working types, like fishermen. What do you think they knew about being lights of the world? Are you kidding me?

And the women who followed him all his days...some were innocents like Mary, others anxious like Martha. Some were prostitutes, and some had been caught in adultery. Some had had many husbands, others had been considered not fit for decent company for many years.

And yet Jesus entrusted to them his gospel concerning salvation. Those who misunderstood him. Who denied him. Who twisted his words to suit themselves in seeking their own glory. Who betrayed him.

Consider these ones that were "called" by God. Consider what was not done by them, but rather by the power of God doing it through them.

"I have faith in you. I believe in you."

God has faith in us...we who are sitting here today. We, who are also called.

It would be my prayer that, in the days and months to come, folks within this parish will feel God's power and faith in us...so that we put aside that inadequacy and fear, and start to share our own gospel stories. Our own personal stories of faith journeys taken. Our own testimonies of our search for spiritual wholeness...or holiness...to be what God calls each us to be. Continuing on a life journey to open up to the joy and the peace that God desires to give to all through the gospel we proclaim.

May we continue to have growing faith and relationship with the God who has faith in us. The one holy and eternal God whose love we are revealed in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

Amen.