



HOW LONG, O LORD?

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Isaiah 6: 1-8

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In today's text, Isaiah had been called by God to speak into the world. To bring a message from God to God's people. And there are times in all of our lives when God leads each of us to do just that. And often times when we hear God's voice, or feel that nudge to follow God's call, we agree to do it. But then when it sinks in, really sinks in, and we understand what we are actually being called to do or to say, we hesitate and we ask ourselves, "Wait, what?!? Hold on a second? I didn't think that's what I was agreeing to." But it is and we are.

Today's lectionary text doesn't take us far enough into the story of Isaiah's call to see that. But right after Isaiah says the notorious line, "Here am I; send me!" God tells him what He is sending him to do and God says to Isaiah, "Go and say to this people:

'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.'

¹⁰ Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed."



¹¹ Then [Isaiah] said, “How long, O Lord?” And [God] said:
“Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
¹² until the LORD sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.
¹³ Even if a tenth part remain in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing
when it is felled.”^[c]
The holy seed is its stump.

Did you catch that? Isaiah said, “How long, O Lord?” Two seconds ago he was ready to do whatever God would tell him to do, he had just said the infamous words, “Here am I; send me!” And that’s when reality hit. When he really understood what God was calling him to do, he said, “Wait, what?!?” Or rather, “How long, O Lord?”

Don’t we all do that? Most of us here are Christians, which means we’ve become followers of Christ and are therefore called to do what He has taught us to do. But then sometimes, we hear God’s voice, or maybe we don’t always think of it as God’s voice but unknowingly the Spirit whispers to us and we get a nudge to change an injustice, or we get angry or sad about something, something important, and we know we need to step up and step in, but then when we realize at what cost it is to us, we don’t.

We no longer really want to do what we have been called to do. We start but then we stop when we need to keep going. “How long, O Lord?” Well, however long it takes, that’s how long. Until cities lie in waste without inhabitants. Until the Lord sends everyone far away. Until the point at which even a tenth of the part of



the wrongdoing, misbehavior, transgression, injustice, or disobedience remains, that it is burned away again. That's how long.

We have all been called, and continue to be called, to speak important things into this world. To stand up to injustices. And sometimes they are small and sometimes they are really big. Interestingly enough, often times the smaller ones (the microcosms) can be the more difficult ones for us because we truly have to face them head on.

There are faces to those names. Real people, real interactions and altercations unlike the larger ones that we see on the news. If we pay close enough attention, we will see that we face things like racism, sexism or classism at work and at school on a daily basis. Bullying is everywhere. Harassment or a fencing of some form or nature is everywhere. Not just on the schoolyard but in the office building. Not just out on the corner of 92nd and Park or over in the latest and greatest place to have brunch, where someone is being kept from sitting at your table. It even happens right here, in our church where we are taught not do such things.

Then there are those bigger ones, those news worthy injustices, and some people have really stepped up to those: Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Malala Yousafzai, Desmond Tutu, Miep Gies and the other people who housed Anne Frank, Anne Frank, Nelson Mandela, and the list goes on and on.

And I'm guessing nearly every single one of them was like Isaiah. Was like me. Was like you. At first you get the call and you get fired up. All riled up over an outrageous injustice. And you're ready. And then it hits you, you realize the words you've just been called to say or the things you've been called to do. You've realized the importance and the majesty. You've realized the work and the struggle that will take place and you say, "wait, what?!" "How long, O God? How hard, O God?" Just like Isaiah. But then also just like Isaiah, you've got to do it too, to follow God's call, to speak into the world, in your home, in this church, on our block, in this city, this country and around the whole world.



When I was called to seminary, I really had no idea what to expect or what I was getting myself into. At first I kind of thought it would be like an intense version of Bible camp or something like that, but I was so wrong. It was Princeton Theological Seminary, what the heck was I thinking.

Anyway, I had a business background, didn't go to a Christian grammar school or high school but rather regular old secular public and private schools. The extent of chapel at any of those schools was singing the Morristown-Beard school song. Not really scripture. Not a Psalm or the Song of Mary. Undergrad was focused on business and after undergrad it was all business. So it felt as though I had no business being at Princeton Seminary. But then again, I guess I did.

Over the years, God had called me there. He had led me step by step and little by little. Sometimes I've said that God's got really big hands, and I've got these teeny tiny ones. And my hands have pushed so hard against God but He just ever so slowly, steadily and gently pushes back with His giant hands. His guiding hands and His guiding ways.

When I left AIG it was to go on and do "humanitarian work" and when I left humanitarian work it was to take God's work even further. I had accepted the call to proclaim the gospel to youth and their families and then I said, "Wait, what?!? Hold on a minute. What did I just get myself into?" Or perhaps in Isaiah's language, "How long, O Lord?"

The first semester of seminary was filled with five three-credit classes and a one-credit speech class. The intensity was so real that one of those classes required us to read an entire book every week and then to teach a class or lead a precept on it. Additionally, most of the people that were in seminary had been studying this stuff since they were in kindergarten and all the way through undergrad. But here I did not even comprehend some of the words coming out of their mouths.



It was catch-up time. In church history a few of us were so far behind we found a way to take additional remedial classes on Saturday mornings to get up to speed with the others. And I was signed up for four years of this stuff? This was some hard stuff. Some life-changing stuff.

And after three months of what felt like boot camp, it was the last weekend in November, bleeding into the first of December, and it was time to get off campus and to go to a good friend's wedding in Boston.... It was a weekend away and I was with good friends having a good time. Books were left way behind. It wasn't another typical Friday or Saturday night with note cards in one hand and a beer in the other but rather a Friday night at Morton's Steak House with a cocktail in hand and best friends from undergrad gathered around telling stories, laughing, and being ridiculous... It was perfect. Everyone had made it to the weekend from their regular jobs and I was missing that. I missed it so much and thought, "I'm done with this nonsense, this is too hard. God, what was I thinking? What were You thinking? I've made a mistake. You've made a mistake. This course I'm on here needs to be redirected."

So when the weekend was over, it was time to go home, back to seminary. And I was committed to speaking with the head of the practical department and telling her that I needed to leave seminary and go back to the "real" world. That maybe I wasn't cut out for this. It was too much, too crazy, and certainly not normal.

She would understand and help me, I knew she would. So Monday morning I marched over to where her office was to set up an appointment. But, as I'm sure you've guessed by now, I never did set up an appointment.

Rather God caught me off guard and put me back on track. When I tried to set up the appointment with her, her assistant asked me what the meeting was in regards to and so I told her. I said I had just been with all my friends and it was the greatest break ever. The real world, where my friends are, and where weekends are, it was glorious and I made a mistake coming here, coming to seminary. I'm a



businessman, I'm a salesman, and seminary is kind of nuts. And then I proceeded to list countless reasons why.

And she said, "Adam, you were called here for a reason. This is all part of God's plan for you." And she shared a story with me of when she had had a similar feeling in her own life. And she told me how in that moment someone had read a psalm to her, and from memory she recited the words to Psalm 46. And afterward she repeated, "be still, Adam, and know that God is God." And I said, "How long, O Lord?" And she said just take a break, Adam, go sit on a bench and pray to God and listen to Him. Be still and know that He is God. And I did. And here I am.

As Christ's children, we have all been called to speak wonder, truth, justice, mercy, peace, and love into this world. And just as Christ has breathed His Spirit into us, so we are to breathe His Spirit back out into this world around us.

If we are in this sanctuary today we have been called by God to speak into this world and to speak out against injustices, wrongdoings, heinous acts, and to speak up for the offended while also speaking to, and sometimes against, the offender.

Sometimes we see something on TV or we hear a message on the radio or a sermon from the pulpit and we get fired up. We sense God calling us to do His will. Maybe we hear something on the news or we see an altercation at work or in a restaurant and we want to speak up, to speak out, but then we realize how hard it is to do that, to go against the grain, and change the world. We feel called but then we really understand what the practicality of God's calling means and we hesitate or we balk. And that's okay because so did countless other Biblical characters before us. The important thing is that we recoup and regroup and keep going, keep pushing forward to do what God has called us to do.

"How long, O Lord?" "As long as it takes and as much as it takes, that's how long," said the Lord.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.