

**Isaiah 6:1-8** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup>And they were calling to one another:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’

<sup>4</sup>At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup>‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’

<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’

<sup>8</sup>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!’

**1 Corinthians 15:1-11** Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup>By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup>and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

**Luke 5:1-11** One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God. <sup>2</sup>He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

<sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’

<sup>5</sup>Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.’

<sup>6</sup>When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup>So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

<sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ <sup>9</sup>For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup>and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’ <sup>11</sup>So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

**As befits the Sunday after** the end of the Christmas and Epiphany season, the Christian year starts with the calling of the disciples. And also Isaiah’s dramatic calling. And this leads us into considering God’s call, and our response, and a consideration of Discipleship.

Isaiah’s calling is dramatic, to say the least. He sees a vision of God’s throne room in heaven, with all the seraphim and the majesty and worship. And whilst awestruck he also guesses that he must die, because no one had seen God, not even Moses or Elijah. He openly confesses that he is a man of unclean lips — but no worries, a seraph touches his lips with a live coal as a sign of his purification, so that’s ok then. And when the Lord calls for someone to send, he does his best Hermione Granger, and shoves his hand in the air immediately, and says, ‘here am I. Send me!!’

I love the enthusiasm. He doesn’t need to be told twice the honour of this calling, and he is eager.

Now, in Luke we encounter Simon and Andrew, James and John. There's a crowd of people eager to hear Jesus. He asks if he can borrow a boat, and Simon agrees. And Jesus preaches. And we have no idea what he says on this occasion. It is what happens next that is important.

Jesus asks them to do something ridiculous. You see, Galilean fishermen fished at night, casting their nets onto shoals of fish. This was the way it was done. Jesus knew nothing about fishing. You just didn't fish in daylight. I don't know how far they were expecting to go out onto the lake, but we know there were crowds of people around, because Jesus had just preached to them. So these fishermen must have been acutely aware of how ridiculous it was to push out from shore in daytime. I think their street cred took a significant knock for doing this. The first thing Jesus asks of them is that they might be willing to be a fool for him.

I read a book about Reese Howells, who was a significant figure in the Welsh revival of 120 years ago. He heard God tell him to take his hat off as he walked to work at the local mine, because he the whole world was God's house and so he was always in God's house and always at worship. Howells did this, and faced ridicule, because at that time no man was seen without his hat. But his faith was rewarded.

The trust of Simon and the others was rewarded here, too, and how!! This is one of many passages that speaks of God's abundance. They didn't just catch some fish after their bad night's fishing, they caught so many the nets were breaking.

Simon Peter's reaction is tellingly like Isaiah's. He is immediately convicted of his sin, and his reaction is to say, 'go away! You're too good for me.' As you know, Judaism had purity laws, particularly focused on the priestly classes. Peter sees the miracle and is worried that Jesus hanging around him is being made impure.

Jesus doesn't just agree with him and then go away. He doubles down on his presence. He tells them to follow him. Stay with me, he says, don't be afraid! Come with me and you can catch something even more important. You can catch people! And the rest is history.

The disciples have an extraordinary training. After only about three years they were equipped to tell the whole world about Jesus. What was so successful about their discipleship?

1. Firstly, they began with the conviction of unworthiness, which means that they were ready to listen and to learn. They knew there was room for growth.
2. They were a group. They discovered God's goodness together, and though they fought a little and had a little rivalry, they were able to go on, in the book of Acts, to share leadership of the new church and constantly encourage each other. Faith is not a lonely pursuit. It is best done in mutual support, in a congregation, in a group.
3. They had a pretty extraordinary teacher. Well that's obvious. But because of what they recorded in the gospels, *we* can have an extraordinary teacher too, even if we don't see it all first hand.

And what of our own discipleship? I think even the acknowledgment of our discipleship is a very helpful start. We need to acknowledge that we are disciples and we are expected to learn. Learning theory is something I think is important — you already know that about me, that I think reading and learning is important. I want to know the Bible well, and know what this reveals about our God. But there's more than head knowledge. There is heart knowledge, there is character and skill.

In the fifth of the Harry Potter books Harry and his friends have a new teacher for Defence against the Dark Arts, who is insistent that a purely theoretical knowledge is quite sufficient. Harry is so disgusted that he forms a secret society in the school where the students practice real defence spells. They learn much more in that year of practice than they had in all the previous years. By the end of the school year Harry has about twenty well equipped allies with him in the struggle against Voldemort.

For us as Christians this more practical learning comes in many forms. It is how to pray (especially when we don't feel like praying) it is growing in faith and acting on that faith. It is training our instincts to do the loving, the magnanimous, the unselfish, the non-judgemental thing, whatever situation arises. It is loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and 'much-ness' — not just our physical strength, but whatever our strengths might be: skills, arts, practicality, wealth, or anything else that is something we are strong in.

And, it may take discipline. It is no mistake that disciple and discipline are related words. An effective disciple requires discipline. Richard Foster, who wrote the book on prayer that I based my Lent course of two years ago on, has written a book called 'Celebration of Discipline'. In this book he talks through spiritual disciplines, social disciplines and worship disciplines. It may sound shocking that we might talk in terms of discipline at all. But this is just part of the topsy turvy world of faith. If you wish to gain life, you must be willing to lose it. If you want to be free, you must be disciplined. We find our deepest freedom when we approach our faith with discipline. Jesus's disciples would all have said that they were there by choice, and if they had their lives again they would do it all over again.

In conclusion, Isaiah and the disciples were called and they responded. They learnt to love God with their hearts, their minds, their souls and their strength. And they did this together. For us to follow in their footsteps we must do the same, but with discipline, determined to pray, to love, to worship with purpose and in the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to enjoy most fully the riches of that faith. Let's pray.

Father God, help us to encourage each other and draw each other on in our faith and discipleship. Build our faith and give us discipline to find the fullest freedom and service in you. Amen.