

Sermon!
“Something happens.”
Isaiah 6:1-8

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The Event of Preaching

When I was in second grade and still a wiggly kid, more was made of Good Friday than is done officially today. Public schools were dismissed at noon so many could go to church. My sister and I went home, because we only had one car and Dad still had to be at work. So, instead of gathering at church, Mom created a sanctuary around the television in the family room where we tuned in to church: early 1960's high-tech church, as-it-were. That was the day some preacher preached and somehow, I listened as he said, “Look at your hands. Open them and look: and see the prints of the nails. They are imprinted on your hands as well.” It might have been a little abstract for a kid almost-eight-years-old, but it made an impression. I looked at my hands and imagined Jesus’ hands: the hands of a servant-savior who sacrificed for me. I was moved and went to my room and closed the door. It was then, in prayer, that it first occurred to me that God might want me to be a pastor. Somehow and someday I knew God wanted me to serve. For a moment anyways, I stopped wiggling. *Something happens.*

Something happens when the Word of God is proclaimed. It’s likely that I will never be able to learn the name of the preacher who preached on television that Good Friday afternoon. It’s likely I’ll never know what church aired the broadcast. I have no idea what else he said in that sermon. All I know is that he was proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ – crucified and something happened, at least to me.

If a preacher is able to maintain a servant’s heart: that’s everything she or he hopes.

That the effort will be used by God and then, according to God’s grace: that *something happens.*

Information and Inspiration

The year that King Uzziah died, 742 B.C.E., probably about 736 years before the birth of Jesus, young Isaiah had a vision. He never says it happened when he was asleep and he saw this in a dream, or if he was sitting in the Temple watching a sacrifice, or if he was out tending his fields as the wind stirred the sea of wheat as the heavens opened. All he says is what he saw.

And what he saw was Heaven. It was a vision that stretched the imagination to observe the loftiest and most overwhelming of all royal chambers. Sitting on the throne was the Creator and Ultimate Ruler of Everything. The attendants of the Ruler were beings more majestic and powerful and pure than imagination could paint. They praised the Ruler; and as they praised God the house shook and filled with smoke – an image of the full Presence of the Almighty.

Isaiah was a little intimidated.

He knew that in the scheme of things he wasn't much. His state and the state of everyone else he knew didn't even meet up to the standards such a God and such an entourage would expect of a creature. Besides that, it was well-known that if a mortal was put face-to-face with the full reality of such a God he or she just couldn't survive it. So Isaiah despaired.

Until one of the beings came and touched his lips with a hot coal and a declaration that even though he didn't meet the standards he was *made suitable to serve*. Then God asked, "Who will go for us?" and Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me!"

That pretty well sums up what the status and the role of the preacher is. Someone who is no better than the rest. Someone who is no holier than the rest. Someone who doesn't deserve anything special in comparison to the rest. But someone who is called to speak and responds with the willingness to go.

And that pretty well sets up the purpose of the sermon. It's a discourse intended to take you for a time into the Heavenly chambers to meet face-to-face with God. That's all it is.

Now let me give you the disclaimer. As hard as a preacher may study the scripture or know the conditions of the world or have a command of theology and doctrine, the content of any sermon is fallible. The preacher can be wrong.

But the proclamation will still be sacred. Look at it in the same way as Scripture was described a moment ago in the worship service: every time God's shown up it's created a buzz. People talk about it and compare notes and refine their understandings. And in the midst of the conversation, God's voice comes through, correcting and inspiring, giving hope and direction. At the heart of the conversation is the Bible. The very heart of the conversation: becoming, in its entirety, the powerful way that we can read and listen to the words and hear again and again the Word of God.

The preacher's sermon is supposed to be, in technical terms, *the hermeneutic*. The preacher is supposed to become so familiar with the contexts of the scripture, and the world, and even him/herself that the message of the Bible can be translated and applied to the world of today and the lives of today's listeners.

So you can get up from the sermon and go to your room and pray and consider what it is that God is saying to you.

For a moment, stop wiggling.

So the sermon is not there to agree with your opinions. And get this: *it is not there to put you to sleep*. It's also not there to impress you with the preacher.

It's there simply to invite you into the holy conversation; bring you to the lofty royal chamber, face-to face with the Almighty.

Preaching is risky business. A preacher can say something you disagree with or makes a point that unsettles you. And you see: that's ok. You are not only permitted to disagree; but more important, it's served its purpose of bringing you into the conversation, being the conversation-starter it is.

Formation

After leaving the seminary campus for work in the church, it didn't take me long to realize just how audacious the act of preaching really is. It occurred to me that I, a 25-year-old youth, had the audacity to be preaching to people who had been mature Christians for twice as long as I had been alive. I wondered, "Who am I to preach to them?" It bothered me for some time until I realized that, as inspired as I might be, what I say from the pulpit is still always going to be a mere human word. Yet when the Word is prayerfully discussed and the congregation prayerfully listens, the sermon may be an event in which the Spirit moves. God acts.

And because of God: *something happens*.