

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH  
February 7, 2010 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Epiphany  
COMMUNION SUNDAY

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "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." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 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!"

Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 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." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets

began to break. So they signaled 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. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 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 catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

I will confess that, at times, I can be pretty obtuse. Something can be right in front of me, clearly in view, or at least Vicki says it is, and I can miss it. I guess there are times when I need to be more aware. Sometimes, we all need to pay more attention to the reality before us.

Both scripture passages for today give us a picture of someone who ultimately pays attention. Both passages show the awareness of what should have been obvious all along.

The story from Isaiah 6 is a classic text. It depicts elements of worship and shows the call of a prophet. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah was praying in the temple.

The impact of the king's death could not be overstated. Uzziah was one of the best kings to follow David and Solomon. He was concerned about and improved all aspects of the life of the nation.

As Isaiah struggled to cope with the news of the king's death, he went to the temple. As he was praying there, the prophet was confronted by the divine presence of God in an encounter that radically changed his life. Responding to his vision of God sitting on the throne of heaven and seeking a representative to be a messenger to the people, Isaiah responded by saying, "Here, am I, Lord. Send me."

In Luke's gospel, two sets of brothers are fishing. They have heard Je-

sus' teachings and seen some wonderful things he has done. Now, though, they returned to their job, fishing. They had fished all night without any success and returned to shore empty-handed. As they prepared to clean their nets, Jesus interrupted them.

Jesus climbed into one of the boats and started to speak to the people gathered on the shore. The size of the crowd grew; the people push closer to him. So, Jesus commanded Peter to put the boat back into the water.

Once they moved away from the shore, Jesus told the brothers to let down their nets again. In a voice filled with exhaustion, Peter said, "Master, we have worked all night long, but have caught nothing. Yet, we will do as you say."

When the nets are lowered and raised up again, they were so full of fish that they almost burst open. Calling for help, the brothers managed to get their surprisingly huge catch to shore. As they landed, Jesus looked at them and invited them to follow him. The four brothers dropped their nets and became full time disciples.

In each story, human beings finally became aware of the presence of the divine with them. We could argue that it should have been easier for them to see the divine. In Isaiah's case, the temple filled with smoke, a hole opened in the roof, and angels began flying from heaven to earth. How could he miss that?

For the fishermen in Luke's gospel, the evidence was not as dramatic, but it was just as effective. We know these men made their living by fishing. We presume they had tried every trick they knew to catch something so their families could eat, but to no avail. It was not until Jesus told them to try again that they had the miraculous catch, possibly the biggest catch they had ever seen. That was enough to convince them.

I would suggest that we are surrounded by the evidence of the divine in

our lives as well. Our problem is we are just not aware enough to discern it.

In 1992, Thomas Moore burst on the religious publishing scene with his book, *Care Of The Soul: A Guide For Cultivating Depth and Sacredness In Everyday Life*. The focus of the book is to help us sense the sacredness in ordinary things. That is the key. If we would only be aware, we would know that even the ordinary moments of life are evidence of the divine.

Think about your life. Are you aware of the divine within you and in the things around you? What things do you experience that helps you be aware of the divine?

Let me ask you: Does anyone love you? You know how contrary you are. You know your faults and idiosyncrasies. You know how difficult you can be. Does not the fact that someone could still love you – and you them – give some evidence of the work of God?

Peter Berger, in his wonderful book, *A Rumor Of Angels*, suggested another evidence of the divine. Berger believes that laughter shows the presence of God. Think about this for a moment. You know how hard life is. You know how our hopes and dreams can be crushed in the blink of an eye. In the face of human travails and tragedies, our ability to laugh shows the presence of something more in our lives, something of the divine.

I do not want to suggest that the presence of God in our lives means that God causes everything to happen that does happen. There are tragedies in this world – accidents, diseases, deaths – that are not caused directly by God. Rather, the presence of God in even the ordinary moments of our lives suggests that God stands with us to give us support and strength and even suffers along with us as we face hard times. We only need to be aware of the reality of the presence of God.

One other thing that the two passages read today suggests is the need to be aware of the human condition. This seems to be a necessary link to the awareness of the divine. Consider Isaiah's response to his encounter with God, as he said, "I am in trouble because I am a sinful man." When the fisherman saw the size of the catch, Peter said, "Just go ahead and leave us, Lord, for we are sinful."

Here, we need to be careful. These responses should not automatically lead us to the conclusion that human beings are to be despised. Our awareness of our humanity should be a recognition of our limitations. We are, after all, imperfect creatures, prone to do the wrong things for the wrong reasons. We know that, despite our best intentions, we mess up. Some of us more than others.

Our value as human beings is emphasized in both passages. For Isaiah and Peter, even with the awareness of their sinfulness, they still knew that the presence of God remained with them.

Robert Fulghum – he of the *Everything I Need To Know I learned in Kindergarten* fame – related the story of Alexander Papaderos, founder of a peace institute on Crete. Papaderos wrote, "As I became a man, I grew to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. But light – truth, understanding, knowledge – is there, and it will shine in many dark places only if I reflect it. . . . I am a fragment of a mirror whose design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless with what I have, I can reflect light into dark places in the world . . . and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise."

Dear people of God, awareness should be a crucial part of our lives. Be aware of the presence of God with you. Be aware of your humanness. Be aware of your responsibilities to reflect the divine light into the world. May we be faithful to do so. AMEN.