

“Sacred Creative Vocation”

The Call of Isaiah is very important because it revealed a template for Worship, the revelation of God’s Grace, Message, and Purpose, and the experience of a Theophany – an encounter with God’s Presence. The Christ Event had much in common with those aspects of Isaiah’s Experience and Call. It is helpful to compare those experiences of Isaiah, Jesus Christ, and ourselves, as we consider, how we are called to fulfill our Sacred Creative Vocation.

Let’s begin by considering the Human Condition during Isaiah’s time, Jesus’ Public Ministry, and our current experience. First, we get a good sense of Isaiah’s setting by reading **Isaiah 1:2-4**, *“The Lord said, ‘Earth and sky, listen to what I am saying! The children I brought up have rebelled against Me. Cattle know who owns them, and donkeys know where their master feeds them. But that is more than My people Israel know. They don’t understand at all.’ Then, Isaiah said, ‘You are doomed, you sinful nation, you corrupt and evil people! Your sins drag you down! You have rejected the Lord, the holy God of Israel, and have turned your backs on Him.’”*

Because many of the people of Judea had turned away from their Covenant Relationship with God and chased after false gods and their selfish desires. They had become prisoners of their false gods and their own evil wants and actions. Isaiah reported their turn toward evil was leading them down the paths of self-destruction. The Prophet shared God’s negative response to their false Worship in **Isaiah 1:11-15**, *“He says, ‘Do you think I want all these sacrifices you keep offering to Me? I have had more than enough of the sheep you burn as sacrifices and of the fat of your fine animals. I am tired of the blood of bulls and sheep and goats. Who asked you to bring Me all this when you come to worship Me? Who asked you to do all this tramping around in My Temple? It’s useless to bring your offerings. I am disgusted with the smell of the incense you burn. I cannot stand your New Moon Festivals, your Sabbaths, and your religious gatherings; they are all corrupted by your sins. I hate your New Moon Festivals and holy days; they are a burden that I am tired of bearing. When you lift your hands in prayer, I will not look at you. No matter how much you pray, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with blood.’”*

While the Prophet shared how God called the people to change, he also reported some of what the Almighty listed as the specific evil deeds of the nation in **Isaiah 1:16-17**, *“Wash yourselves clean. Stop all this evil that I see you doing. Yes, stop doing evil and learn to do right. See that justice is done — help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows.”* So, allowing or carrying out injustice, especially against the vulnerable – the oppressed, the orphans, and the widows were clear indications of living alienated from our Divine Parent.

During the earthly life of Jesus Christ, Judea and Samaria – Israel were occupied by the Roman Empire and its soldiers. **The Religious Elite, for the most part, were comprised of the Priests, the Teachers of the Law, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees who turned toward legalism and self-interest as their gods.** In addition to suffering the oppression of the Roman Empire, the people of Judea and Samaria were heavily burdened by the legalism and prejudices of the Religious Elite. Many people bore the brunt of those prejudices and were the outcasts of the Jewish Society. **All of humanity suffered because of their alienation from God and their neighbors, as well as, from being separated from living the lives God intended for All People.** Everyone needed the Truth about the New Life and New Relationship with God. The life the Almighty wants for us and invites All People to live.

In our present, we are all blessed to live in the United States of America. Although ours is the greatest nation on planet Earth, it has always had short comings, such as allowing slavery to continue until near the conclusion of the Civil War. The dream for the USA included the liberation of, justice for, and welcome of All People. For example, the Statue of Liberty was a gift to the United States by the people France in the late 1800’s. On it is inscribed these words of **Emma Lazarus**:

**“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me;
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”**

Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, was founded by German Immigrants, who sought to live that dream as they came to America over 118 years ago. They left Germany because of poverty and militarism, which was prevalent at that time. They did not always experience being welcomed, especially during World Wars I and II. During those times, they experienced oppression and prejudice.

Unfortunately, as the Judeans and their leaders mistreated the vulnerable during the times of Isaiah and Jesus, the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America recently disclosed, **“We are concerned that overcrowding and prolonged detention represent an immediate risk to the health and safety of DHS agents and officers, and to those detained.”**

Additionally, the Federal government has been violating Federal Court orders with reference to separating immigrant children from their parents and holding them for more than 72 hours. Furthermore, the Federal government is planning to hold asylum seeking immigrants in detention centers (pause), even when they have legally entered the US at a port of entry. **What would be Isaiah’s answer to the question of whether our nation is providing justice for the vulnerable?**

With reference to the Deliverance – Healing – Forgiveness, which the nation of Judea needed during God’s Encounter with – Call of Isaiah, **verses 6-7** of our Reading stated, **“Then one of the creatures flew down to me, carrying a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with the burning coal and said, ‘This has touched your lips, and now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven.’”** Anyone eager to have a “burning coal” touch your lips to either remove your guilt or to prove your sins are forgiven?

Instead of inflicting pain upon “sinners” and/or their lips or taking upon himself the infliction of pain to fulfill some requirement, through Jesus, we are forgiven and liberated from our self-destructive lives, **Jesus came as God’s Highest Representative – the Son of God to reveal the Truth of God’s Agape Love for All People.** He was sent to show the Divine Parent has already forgiven All People, wants us to be liberated from false gods and self-centeredness. Jesus came to bring the healing of our brokenness and alienation from one another and God. Through Jesus Christ, the Almighty invites us into a New Faith Relationship with God and All People, the New Life in Christ. Through the “Word made flesh” Our Divine Parent’s Welcome into that New Relationship and New Life in the Kingdom of God is announced. **The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ proved this Truth about God’s Agape Love for us!**

With reference to one’s Calling, consider what the Lord God said to Isaiah in **verses 8-12**, **“Then I heard the Lord say, ‘Whom shall I send? Who will be Our messenger?’ I answered, ‘I will go! Send me!’”** Isaiah explained, **“So he told me to go and give the people this message: ‘No matter how much you listen, you will not understand. No matter how much you look, you will not know what is happening.’ Then he said to me, ‘Make the minds of these people dull, their ears deaf, and their eyes blind, so that they cannot see or hear or understand. If they did, they might turn to me and be healed.’ I asked, ‘How long will it be like this, Lord?’ He answered, ‘Until the cities are ruined and empty — until the houses are uninhabited — until the land itself is a desolate wasteland. I will send the people far away and make the whole land desolate.’”**

Over one hundred years after those words were spoken to and by the Prophet Isaiah, in 587 B.C., the Babylonians carried off most of the leadership and skilled persons of Judea to live in exile in Babylon. **Jesus Christ and his Body, the Church, are the fulfillment of God’s Promise that some people would finally learn the Truth.** Indeed, explaining why he sometimes taught in parables, Jesus said many would hear and not understand or see and not perceive. It takes quite an awakening for a person to finally recognize the Truth that our Divine Parent already Agape Loves us and has given us Grace – Undeserved Forgiveness, Healing, Liberation, Invitation, and Welcome. Why? I suspect it is because we human beings want to believe we do not need anyone else’s agape love, forgiveness, healing, liberation, invitation, and welcome. It is only because God’s Agape Love was so powerfully revealed in the Death and Resurrection of God’s Own Son, do we have the opportunity to begin to understand the depth of God’s Agape Love for us. Thus, because of that opportunity, we may respond with praise, thanksgiving, and acceptance of our Divine Parent’s Grace and Invitation.

Jesus Christ – the Son of God and Highest Representative has provided us our Call to become his and God’s Agents – people with the Sacred Creative Vocation to continue to reveal to many others how God wants to Transform their lives into the true and blessed lives God intended for us at the Creation of the Universe. We are called to follow God’s and Jesus’ Examples of Agape Love, Grace, Liberation, Healing, Invitation to live the New Relationship with God and All People and New Life of Agape Love in Jesus Christ, and to then Welcome All, who seek to accept God’s Invitation. **Look for your opportunities to be God’s Agent or Representative, who Demonstrates, Reveals, Invites, and Welcomes Everyone, who may become open to the Agape Love and Forgiveness of God in their lives!** Let that be your Sacred Creative Vocation. Amen.