

Title: "In Contrast to Christ"

Dorset 02/05/22

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 5:1-11

Theme: When we compare ourselves to Christ, we find ourselves lacking - for we see ourselves as we really are. Therefore, we need to reach out to Christ and ask for help to be more like him.

The evangelist Dwight Moody once said, "The best way to show that a stick is crooked is not to argue about it or to spend time denouncing it, but to lay a **straight** stick beside it."

Did you notice that both Scripture passages this morning involve laying straight sticks!

The reading from the Hebrew Scriptures recounts God's call to Isaiah to be a prophet. Isaiah sees a vision of God – and what is his first reaction? "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips!" Compared to the righteousness and purity of God, Isaiah saw himself to be a sinner.

Then there is Peter. Luke recalls Jesus' call to Peter to be one of his disciples. Peter and his fellow fishermen had been fishing all night but had caught nothing. Jesus tells them to go out into the deep water and let down their nets – again. Peter protests – slightly – but then says, "If you say so... we'll try again..." You can almost see Peter's resigned expression, He really doesn't think they will catch anything this time, either, but he shrugs. What does he have to lose? So when they catch more than they could manage, Peter realizes who Jesus is! And what is his reaction? "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

If these two men of **stature** from Scripture see themselves as flawed individuals, what chance do we have of being "worthy?"

Well, perhaps time and distance have jaded our perceptions of these two men.

Let's look at Isaiah. From what we know of his life, he was probably a priest, or at least a member of the aristocracy. We assume that he led a good life, observing the holy days of the

Jewish law and custom. Why else would he experience a vision of God? He was in the temple and not only did he see God, high and lifted up on a throne, but he also saw angels, singing God's praises. When was the last time you or I had such a vision? No... Isaiah must have been a much holier – and worthy – person than we are!

But Isaiah himself did not see it that way!

And what about Peter? Jesus himself called Peter the rock – and the Church was founded on him! But aren't we forgetting what else the Scriptures reveal about him? Peter the hot-headed impulsive guy? The one who three times denied knowing Jesus? Many times Peter felt he wasn't worthy to even be in Christ's presence...

What about us? Do we **feel** worthy? **Are** we worthy?

One day a Sunday School teacher was trying to make a little boy behave in class. "I'm really very much afraid," she said, "that I'm not going to meet you in heaven." "Gee, that's too bad," replied the little lad. "What have you been doing?"

When we compare ourselves to one another, we generally find that we are no worse an offender than the next person, and perhaps even better!

But what both Isaiah and Peter both realized is that we err when we use human standards. What we are called to do is to compare and contrast ourselves to Jesus the Christ. When we compare ourselves to Jesus, we can conclude nothing short of the fact that we are sinners, people who fall short of God's plan for us.

But let us remember that God did not desert Isaiah; Jesus did not leave Peter. God knows we are flawed, sinful people, but that doesn't deter God from calling us to be faithful people, capable of serving God and one another!

A woman was complaining about saying a prayer of confession in the worship service. She didn't feel it was appropriate, for it made her feel sinful and unworthy – and she really didn't think she was **that** bad. Besides, she attended church to be uplifted, not put down!

Well, she has a point; we do come to church to be renewed, refreshed, uplifted, but that's not the only reason we come, is it? If we look again at the two passages we read this morning (the call of Isaiah and the call of Peter) they are strikingly similar in their structure – shedding light on how **we** are called to journey in faith.

First, they experienced God's presence among them and they were awed and humbled in God's presence. This, too, must be our first step. When we come to church, we sit in silence, away from our busy routines...waiting to feel God's presence. Then, with the Call to Worship, our thoughts are focused on God and all that God has done and is doing for us through Jesus Christ. We are called to remember **why** we come to worship...and then, like the angels, we sing praises to God.

In light of all this, we **then** confess our sins of commission and our sins of omission.

A colleague of mine once asked the kids during the Children's Message if they knew what sins of omission were. One bright boy responded, "Aren't they the sins we should have committed, but didn't?"

Well... not quite.... when we acknowledge our sins of commission and omission, we acknowledge our brokenness and our need for God to step in and fix us, right?

That is why we so eagerly embrace the Assurance of Pardon, isn't it? But let us not stop there!

Then we need to hear God's word proclaimed to us. We need to hear God calling to us again and again and again to be Jesus's followers... to answer the call to discipleship. Christ comes to us now, as he did to the disciples of long ago, not only to reveal our present selves, but also to reveal our possible selves.

For Isaiah, it was revealed that he would be a prophet – speaking God's word to a people who did not want to listen.

For Peter, he knew that he had to follow Jesus, daily listening and learning, in preparation when he would have to carry out Christ's ministry and mission.

And what about us? God **has** called us and **is** calling us and **will** always call us to be Jesus's disciples, to learn from him – **and then** be his apostles, those sent out to spread the word of God and meet the needs of God's children.

Let us consider our lives in contrast to Christ – and therefore be humbled and awe-struck at the goodness and greatness of God. Let us embrace the fact that God who created all that there is, cares for us and is willing and eager to give us the new life in Christ. Let us hear and respond **every day** to God's call to be God's people in this world, giving help and hope to all God's children. Let us, like Isaiah answer, "Here I am. Send me!"

Let us pray.... In contrast to you, O Christ, who can stand? But we give you thanks that you see past our sins and our flaws and that you empower us to follow where you lead. Here we are, O God. Send us. AMEN!

PRAYER OF PASTORAL CARE Feb 6, 2022 Communion

O God most high, you meet us where we live and invite us to be part of your purpose. All thanks and praise to you, for you hear our prayers for the church, for the world, and all who live in it.

**On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength of soul.**

We pray for the church and for all who work to bring others a word of compassion. Help us overcome distrust of one another that we may more fully live as partners of your beloved community.

**On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength of soul.**

We pray for peace among nations and peace among people. We thank you for those involved in peace making and in the challenges of reconciliation.

**On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength of soul.**

We pray for those suffering from war, or from calamities of nature. Be with the people of Myanmar in the midst of conflict.

**On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength of soul.**

We pray for those who are oppressed and need courage to resist.

**On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength of soul.**

We pray for those who because of illness or hardship are paralyzed by fear. We thank you for workers in mental health. May we all become better listeners and builders in care and trust.

**On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength of soul.**

We bring before you those on the church's immediate needs list.

God of majesty and glory, through Jesus Christ you summon us into your compassion for all creation. Renew in us your call, and release us from all fear, that we may testify in words and deeds to your steadfast love for all. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

OFFERING

Through Jesus Christ we have come to know the abundance of God.

May we give generously, as has been given to us.

*DOXOLOGY

*PRAYER

O Holy God, we give you thanks for your generosity to us. Bless the gifts we bring and multiply them, for the sake of those in need; in Jesus' name. Amen.

