

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

OLD TESTAMENT

Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah's Vision of the Lord

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

Ch 6 Isaiah's vision is the climax of his message in chs 1–5. This glimpse of God's glory (vv 1–5; Jn 12:41), validates his message from God in this Book. (TLSB)

6:1 *the year that King Uzziah died.* † 740 B.C. Isaiah's commission probably preceded his preaching ministry; the account was postponed to serve as a climax to the opening series of oracles and to provide warrant for the shocking announcements of judgment they contain. The people had mocked the "Holy One of Israel" (5:19), and now he has commissioned Isaiah to call them to account. Uzziah reigned from 792 to 740 and was a powerful king. When he insisted on burning incense in the temple, however, he was struck with leprosy and remained leprous until his death (2Ch 26:16–21). He was also called Azariah (2Ki 14:21; 2Ch 26:1). (CSB)

Also called Azariah. Powerful king of Judah (792–740 BC; 2Ki 15:1–7; 2Ch 26). Human monarchs come and go, but God always reigns. (TLSB)

"In the year that King Uzziah died." Because of the difficulty in determining biblical chronology exactly, dates ranging from 757 BC to 740 BC have been suggested for Uzziah's (Azariah's) death. Despite the difficulty in determining this date absolutely, Isaiah's vision is firmly grounded in a definite historical event. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

This is a turning point in Israel's history. They had become complacent and it would be Isaiah's job to confront them about their lacks worship and living habits.

Second Chronicles 26:22 tells us that Isaiah was the recorder of the events during the reign of King Uzziah. Isaiah dated this chapter and its vision carefully. During the reign of Uzziah (also called Azariah; see 2 Kings 14:15) and his son Jotham, Judah extended her boundaries to their ancient frontiers. Commerce and agriculture flourished. The age created a sense of national pride. It was a time of prosperity and peace. (PBC)

Israel, Judah's neighbor to the north, also experienced a period of national independence and power. Under Jeroboam II, Israel asserted itself and achieved military dominance in the area. Jeroboam II died several years before Uzziah. When he died, the Northern Kingdom, Israel, plunged into an age of chaos. Four of Israel's last six kings were assassinated. Zechariah ruled

only six months when Shallum assassinated him and succeeded him. Menahem assassinated Shallum and after one month ruled for ten years. Assyria invaded during his reign and demanded tribute. The end was fast approaching. Pekahiah succeeded Menahem, but after two years, one of his chief officers, Pekah, assassinated the king and became king of Israel. All this was past history when Uzziah died during the reign of Pekah. (PBC)

Just as the death of Jeroboam II became the sunset for the North, the death of Uzziah marked the beginning of the end for Judah. Assyria had already begun to dominate the region, exacting tribute from Israel. Judah and Jerusalem fell under the shadow of the great superpowers to the northeast – Assyria and later Babylon. Peace and prosperity would soon disappear. (PBC)

All this has spiritual implications. God had sent prophets to warn of the judgments that He would send to Israel. The nation had turned away from Him. The judgment that would come less than 50 years after Uzziah's death slowly moved onward like an enormous millstone. God had set in motion and warned of its coming, but its momentum could not be stopped except by God Himself. If He did not stop it, the war machine of Assyria would grind Israel to dust. Israel refused to listen to the Lord's call to repent; the judgment continued to roll toward Israel. In spite of the warnings, God's people remained ignorant of the scope of the disaster. Worse yet, they were defiant, believing they could withstand the Assyrian forces. Samaria fell to the Assyrian invaders in 722 B.C. (PBC)

At Uzziah's death, Judah also stood in the path of God's judgment – a different judgment, but one just as certain. God had started another great stone moving. Babylon would follow Assyria as the dominant military power in the region. The judgment on Judah and Jerusalem came because God's people there had also forsaken Him. The Assyrian army destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and ravaged the Judean countryside, but it could not conquer Jerusalem. Over a century later, in 586 B.C., the Babylonians ground Judah to dust and carried the Southern Kingdom into captivity. During the years between the end of Israel and the captivity of Judah, God sent prophets to Judah to call them to repentance. But the people persisted in their rejection of the Lord and His promises. The death of Uzziah signaled the beginning of a new era for Judah. Prosperity and peace would disappear. Judgment was on the way. One strange irony of history pointed to a future judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. About the year Uzziah died, Rome was founded. (PBC)

I saw. Probably in a vision in the temple. (CSB)

In a vision. Hilary of Poitiers: "Isaiah says that he has seen no God but Him. For he did actually see the glory of God, the mystery of Whose taking flesh from the Virgin he foretold.... He gazed upon the Divine glory, and men were filled with envy at such honour vouchsafed to his prophetic greatness. For this was the reason why the Jews [Judeans] passed sentence of death upon him" (NPNF 2 9:95). (TLSB)

the Lord. The true King (see v. 5). (CSB)

throne. The King of the universe is described in images of power and might. The ark of the covenant, kept in the Most Holy Place in the temple, was covered with two cherubim. God is "enthroned on the cherubim" (1Sm 4:4; 2Sm 6:2; Ps 80:1). (TLSB)

high and lifted.† The same Hebrew words are applied to God in 57:15, and similar terms are used of the suffering servant in 52:13. (CSB)

train of his robe. A long, flowing garment. Cf. the robe of the “son of man” in Rev 1:13. (CSB)

The long flowing trail of the royal garment in which the King of kings appeared to Isaiah was so large that it “filled the temple.” (May refer to the smoke of the incense offering; cf vv 4, 6.) (TLSB)

This magnificent robe is symbolic of the divine “doxa,” is Gods’ majesty, the divine glory in which is reflected God’s hidden essence. (Stoekhardt)

filled the temple – This indicates the completeness of God’s rule and is a huge contrast to Uzziah. This would be of great comfort to Isaiah as he carried out his ministry

temple. Probably the heavenly temple, with which the earthly temple was closely associated. John’s vision of God on his throne is similar (Rev 4:1–8). (CSB)

Meant is the heavenly sanctuary, the place where God may be seen by angels and saints. This sanctuary is totally filled with the glory of the Almighty. (Stoekhardt)

6:2 Above. Flanking the throne as an honor guard, much as the gold cherubim flanked the ark of the covenant. (TLSB)

seraphim. See v. 6; angelic beings not mentioned elsewhere. The Hebrew root underlying this word means “burn,” perhaps to indicate their purity as God’s ministers. (It refers to venomous snakes in 14:29; 30:6; see Nu 21:6.) They correspond to the “living creatures” of Rev 4:6–9, each of whom also had six wings. (CSB)

Hbr plural noun, occurring only here and in v 6 as a name for celestial beings. Hbr *saraph* suggests that they were glowing or fiery beings. Though their description is somewhat cryptic, the point of this vision is God’s glory, not the details of His attendants. (TLSB)

Sərapim (also in v 6), derived from *sarap* (to burn) in HALOT, but an earlier lexicon (Gesenius) suggests the word is related to an Arabic word referring to “princes, nobles of heaven.” The word as referring to a particular order of the angels occurs only here in Isaiah 6, where the seraphim have the specific duty of praising and serving God at his throne in heaven. At any rate, one cannot make a (verbal) connection with the “burning [or glowing] coal,” which is the single Hebrew word *ritsapah*. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

They are heavenly beings with certain human characteristics (face, hands, feet) and the capacity of speech. Their name means “burning ones”; fire represents holiness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

stood ... flew. “Stood” means positioned, as in “stood guard.” They did this by flying around the throne and praising God. Some rabbis held that angels were created on the fifth day of creation with the birds because they could fly. (TLSB)

six wings – Two covered their faces, for even in their perfection the surpassing brilliance of God was overwhelming. With another two they cover their lower body in modesty. The last two are used to serve the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

covered their faces. Apparently they could not gaze directly at the glory of God. (CSB)

Seraphim covered their faces in reverence before God's holy presence. They also covered their bodies in modesty. This is the antithesis of pagan worship that featured illicit sexuality. (TLSB)

This means that the angels worship God with such great reverence that they do not even look at God. The Jews on the contrary stood with head held high and neck stiff, that it would almost be up to God to fear them. Then the angels also covered their feet, because they would not want their walk and their endeavors to appear in the presence of God, as if they were pure before Him. In the Scriptures walking on foot means following some kind of life. John says (Matt. 3:3): "Prepare the way of the Lord," that is, lead a good life. Therefore these seraphim do not wish to boast of their wisdom and zeal of life, but they hide everything. What do we worms have to be proud about? (Luther)

6:3 *one called to another* – Now the service the seraphim are rendering is described in greater detail. Above all else, their service consists in this, that they extol and praise God. In two choirs the seraphim hover around the throne of God, and the two choirs not begin an antiphony. (Stoekhardt)

Though God's people today sing the words of this verse in the Divine Service, Isaiah does not necessarily indicate that the seraphim sang. (TLSB)

Holy, holy, holy. The repetition underscores God's infinite holiness. Note the triple use of "the temple of the LORD" in Jer 7:4 to stress the people's confidence in the security of Jerusalem because of the presence of that sanctuary. (CSB)

Refers to God in His totally separated state from humanity. In Hbr, repetition expresses a superlative; God is supremely holy. This threefold repetition is also evocative of the three persons of the Trinity. Ambrose: "They say it, not once, lest you should believe that there is but one; not twice, lest you should exclude the Spirit; they say not holies, lest you should imagine that there is plurality, but they repeat three times and say the same word, that even in a hymn you may understand the distinction of Persons in the Trinity, and the oneness of the Godhead and while they say this they proclaim God" (NPNF 2 10:151). (TLSB)

"Holy, holy, holy." The song of the seraphim is prominent in both Jewish and Christian liturgies, underscoring its importance as a liturgical declaration about God. For the Christian, the threefold "holy" shows not only the absolute holiness of God, but also the three holy persons in one holy God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

The revelation of His presence, either in nature (Ps 19:1) or in history (1Ki 8:11; Jn 1:14). (TLSB)

"The whole earth is full of his glory." ESV offers an alternative reading: "May his glory fill the whole earth." This clause, like the preceding one, is a verbless clause, which would normally be read in the indicative. The clause is parallel to the preceding one, which is clearly indicative present tense. There seems, therefore, to be no reason to read this clause with a jussive force. The main text of the ESV is preferable. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

The holy angels confess that the Lord is holy, holy in an altogether different measure and sense than they are. God is holy, that is separated, set apart, infinitely exalted not only above the sins of men but above all creatures. The triple "holy" not only reinforces the concept holiness but points

to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. There are three persons in the Godhead, and each one is God, is holy, in the same measure. (Stoeckhardt)

The Lord of Hosts not only permits Himself and His holiness to be viewed, as far as it is possible for creatures to do so, by the heavenly hosts, but reveals Himself and His holiness also on earth, to human being on earth. (Stoeckhardt)

kawdoshe – The Holy One, his eminence. This is used 39 times in Isaiah. He cannot tolerate sin and requires that his people be holy too.

full of his glory. In Nu 14:21–22; Ps 72:18–19 the worldwide glory of God is linked with his miraculous signs. (CSB)

All that he has done in creating, sustaining, redeeming, and sanctifying is evidence of his holy majesty and power. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

The whole earth is full of God’s glory. This, according to Scripture, for instance, Num 14:21, is the end of the ways and works of God on earth, that the whole earth is to be filled with His glory. (Stoeckhardt)

The angels in heaven take an interest in all that happens on earth, in what God does among and to men, and with all mankind praise God for what He does to the children of men. God’s great deeds and wonders on earth find their echo in heaven, in the song of praise of the heavenly hosts. (Stoeckhardt)

6:4 thresholds... shook ... filled with smoke. Similarly the power of God’s voice terrified the Israelites at Mount Sinai, and the mountain was covered with smoke (see Ex 19:18–19; 20:18–19). (CSB)

thresholds shook – This description also emphasizes the majesty of God who will use a human being in the ministry of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

The earth shook in the holy presence of the Lord, down to the bedrock of the Temple Mount. (TLSB)

This points to the shape of true religion, which is confession, praise, the proclamation of God. When this is known, man is terrified and humbled, and he gives up everything in which he formerly trusted and of which he made his boast. The preaching of grace confounds all self-assurance. (Luther)

TEMPLE FILLED WITH SMOKE – According to the context, in which we are told about the song of praise of the seraphim and its mighty effect, we are to take this smoke as incense, as a symbol of worship. And since shortly before the discussion concerned the revelation of God’s glory on earth, meant by the incense are the prayers of the saints on earth. Cf. Rev 5:8; 8:3,4. Men on earth, who also observe the glory of God, unite their voices with the voices of the angels and together with the holy seraphim give to the three times Holy One praise, glory, and adoration. (Preface & Sanctus) (Stoeckhardt)

The same thing happened when Solomon dedicated the temple. We read in 1 Kings 8:10: “A cloud filled the house of the Lord.” It signifies that God dwells in faith and that He is not served

except by faith which confesses and praises God, who is too lofty to be contained by works. So Paul almost always argues against works of the Law and for faith. And this vision is for faith. Words belong to the Antichristians. Even the miracles of Christ were such as were grasped by the senses. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting, yet not except in the vision. Nevertheless, they are called Lord and seraphim, who were seen and yet cannot be seen. Someone voices the slander that the body of Christ is not in the bread because it cannot be seen and that it cannot be anything else except what is seen. Against those people stands this passage, where the prophet saw what cannot be seen. He saw a form, and yet he says he saw the Lord Himself. One thing is shown, another is hidden. He who eats the bread eats also the body of Christ. Christ's way of speaking, "This is My body," is of the same kind as the Father's, "This is My beloved Son." (Matt. 3:17). Thus in the dove the Holy Spirit was seen. (Luther)

voice of him. The seraph. (TLSB)

6:5 *Woe.* Isaiah's cry indicates that he is as good as dead. Ex 33:20 declares no one may see God and live. (TLSB)

I am lost - dawmaw – To be destroyed or obliterated. Isaiah recognizes the vast gulf between himself and God the Holy One. He is grievously aware of his sinful condition. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

for I am a man – There are two reasons for Isaiah's distress. First, he knew that purity of speech is required for the worship of God, but his lips were impure. Second, Isaiah recognized that he belonged to same people who were corrupt to whom he was to minister. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

Ceremonial impurity. Impure people were barred from the temple (cf Ps 15). (TLSB)

tamē', an adjective meaning "unclean," that is, ritually and ceremonially impure, defiled. It is the opposite of *qadush* ("holy") of v 3 and falls into the same semantic field as "sinful." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

A deep sense of unworthiness overcame Isaiah. Who was he that he should see this vision? Even angels had to cover their feet and faces. Isaiah is so far away from the holiness of God that he could make only one conclusion: "I am ruined!" God's holiness separates Him from sinners. His might power threatens every sinner with eternal separation and punishment. Isaiah stood before God empty-handed. He could offer the one on the throne nothing to bridge the great difference. Isaiah's best is nothing in the presence of God's absolute holiness and power. It would have been presumptuous for Isaiah to suggest that he has tried to live as God wanted. The prophet's works of service, as valuable as they were, made no difference here. He was unclean and lived among sinners. (PBC)

This is the distress and trial of conscience than which no other is more dreadful, namely, to be put on trial concerning the Word and doctrine. The ungodly and fanatics can think of everything except this, where they sin most. Isaiah feels this, and his conscience is tormented in final death, and he says that he is unworthy to teach. He confesses not that he has defiled hands, but defiled lips, that is, an unclean mouth, and he says that the entire nation is thus afflicted. No, this seems to be blasphemy, not only because he says he has seen God but also because he confesses that his teaching is useless and he thinks he must teach otherwise. And certainly reason, even when it teaches the Law and the Prophets in the very best way, is defiled. For the Law, as Paul says in Rom. 4:15; Heb. 7:19, justifies no one but rather makes him guilty. Therefore teaching the Law is

not the same as cleansing man, neither hearer nor teacher, since also those who teach the true force of the Law are unclean. For by faith, says Peter (Acts 15:9), the hearts are cleansed, not by works or merits. Therefore saintly Isaiah, too, even to the extent that he taught the Law for the purpose of touching consciences, is defiled and dies as a defiled man. Hence the vision has this purpose, that the righteousness of the people may be condemned and they may aspire to the glory which the prophet saw, that is, move from Law to grace. The prophet is saying: We must become holier so that we may go to the Lord sitting on His lofty throne; we must hear the seraphim and the heavenly fires. You see, he brings charges against himself as well as the people. This has been no small reason for a great disagreement. For such things the saintlets do not want to hear, since they regard their own teaching to be most true and most pure. (Luther)

eyes have seen the King. Isaiah was dismayed because anyone who saw God expected to die immediately. (CSB)

Isaiah feared because his eyes had seen the Lord, and he knew that no one can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). But God has chosen to reveal Himself to the prophet. The vision is for the benefit of Isaiah, for the benefit of ministry, and for us. God grants the vision to this sinful man by undeserved love. He will not die, but will live. (PBC)

For that reason, he says, “I am lost.” But it turned out for the salvation of the prophet that he was thus thrust down to hell, so that he might be led away and lead others away from that uncleanness of the Law to the purity of Christ, so that He alone might reign. (Luther)

6:6 *seraphim flew to me* – Here now a resurrection from the dead takes place. We see that sinners who acknowledge their sins are not abandoned. The prophet cries out that he is lost, that he is oppressed with the consciousness of a defiled mouth, and that he has felt sin and death. And on that account he obtained forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, etc.” says 1 John 1:9; and 1 John 2:1 says: “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father”; so also 1 John 5:18. God hates the sin of hardening and its being defended. Let them be cleansed and let them confess their uncleanness, especially that of the mouth. For where lips and doctrine are unclean, there unclean works follow. Therefore the seraph approaches to set the prophet free from his sin. But he uses means. So, then, two things are set forth to the prophet, namely, Word and sign. The Lord often acts this way. The lips are cleansed by fire. This is the sign. The Word is: “Your guilt be taken away.” Here our sacraments are established. Yet these are disdained and shamefully handled by some who say: Nothing external benefits the soul.⁴ But let them criticize as much as they want. What Isaiah experiences here is not a fairy tale, but as there are fearful and serious voices, so there is also absolution, which then is granted through the addition of the sign to the Word. Now, what that sign could do, this our Baptism can also do. (Luther)

burning coal. Coals of fire were taken inside the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12), when sacrifice was made to atone for sin. (CSB)

Fire from the altar of incense. (TLSB)

tongs - melāqachayim. This word has the dual ending, indicating something in a pair, or doubled. It is a noun derived from the verb *laqach*, “to take.” Together, we have “double taker things,” an apt description of a pair of tongs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

Needed to arrange the burning coals. (TLSB)

altar. The altar of incense in the Holy Place. The context could imply that Isaiah was a priest serving in the temple. While there was an altar for burning incense in the temple, Isaiah likely saw a vision of heaven. (Cf Ex 25:9, 40; 26:30 for possible references to a tabernacle in heaven; early Jewish and Christian tradition noted these texts.) The angel would get this burning coal from the altar in heaven. This image reinforces the truth that God's people in the earthly temple were in God's presence, but God was not confined to a building. Rather, He promised to meet them in the temple. (TLSB)

6:7 *touched your lips*. When God commissioned Jeremiah, his hand touched the prophet's mouth (Jer 1:9). (CSB)

Only when God has forgiven Isaiah will he be able and ready to proclaim God's Holy Word. This holiness is not from Isaiah's own works but is God's gracious gift; Holy Communion is also God's gracious gift. John of Damascus: "Let us apply our eyes and lips and brows and partake of the divine coal.... Isaiah saw the coal. But coal is not plain wood but wood united with fire; in like manner also the bread of the communion is not plain bread but bread united with divinity" (NPNF 2 9:83). (TLSB)

By cauterizing Isaiah's lips, God prepared him to be a spokesman of purification to his unclean people. God does the same for Jeremiah (1:9) and Ezekiel (2:8-3:11) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

sin atoned for – This action may have reminded Isaiah of the Day of Atonement, when coals of fire from the altar of sacrifice were brought into the Most Holy Place so that the ministering priest would not die but be able to sprinkle the atoning blood (Lev. 16:12-16) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

Parallel concepts emphasizing God's forgiveness. Isaiah did nothing for this forgiveness: the Lamb of God took his guilt and atoned for his sin. Ambrose: "Shall take away, he [the Seraph] says, and shall purge, not I will take away, but that fire from the altar of God, that is, the grace of the Spirit.... Certainly not the wood of the forests, nor the soot and coals.... It was revealed by the mouth of Isaiah that all men should be cleansed by the passion of Christ, Who as a coal according to the flesh burnt up our sins" (NPNF 2 10:108). (TLSB)

God Himself reached across the difference between His holiness and Isaiah's sin. He took away the guilt of the prophet in a symbolic action. The coal came from the altar, the place of sacrifice. The message of absolution is clear: "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Sinners who acknowledge their sins are not abandoned. God made Isaiah a saint, a human holy one, through atonement and forgiveness. We know this to have been accomplished by the suffering and death of Jesus. Isaiah will write eloquently about the work of Jesus later in his prophecy (chapter 53). Here Isaiah was assured that he could stand before God because of the cleansing. His status was changed by God's act, not by any human effort or desire. It was by grace, not works; it is always by grace and not by works. (PBC)

6:1–7 The Lord appears to Isaiah and calls him as a prophet. In your Baptism and through the Word, the Lord calls you too as His messenger. Relate to others what you have heard and seen about the Lord. Do not let the shame of past sins silence you. The Lord Jesus has made atonement for you in the tabernacle of God's presence on high. • Touch my mouth, O Savior, that I may sing: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of pow'r and might: Heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." Amen. (LSB, p 161). (TLSB)

Isaiah's Commission from the Lord

8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

6:8–10 Isaiah’s prophetic commission will have the ironic but justly deserved effect of hardening the callous hearts of rebellious Israel—and so rendering the warnings of judgment sure (see vv. 11–13). See also Jer 1:8, 19; Eze 2:3–4.

6:8 *I heard a voice* – Now the effect of the vision is shown, which is that the Jews are partly to be received and partly to be hardened. Almost all the prophets were accustomed to contend with these saintlets and wiseacres who always resist the Holy Spirit, blaspheme the Word and grace of God, and boast of their own righteousness, their own works, and their own ideas. And especially when the carnal man begins to learn the things that pertain to faith while his reason has not yet been mortified and has not yet been taught its beliefs, this is a situation to be deplored. The Word of God does not always have humble hearers; on the contrary, the great majority of hearers are proud and presumptuous. (Luther)

No longer the seraphim (v 7), now God Himself speaks. In contrast to the fear that followed the seraphim’s voice, here the prophet is encouraged by the Lord’s voice. (TLSB)

whom shall I send – The Lord wants to send someone to speak for Him. The question here is for the benefit of Isaiah. God wants to send a human to speak for Him. God could have sent the seraphs who sang in the heavenly temple, but He does not choose to do that. Instead, God desires to send a creature limited not only by flesh and blood but also by sin. The man in God’s presence here has just confessed his sinfulness, yet God wants to send him. (PBC)

That is, many indeed refused the office of teaching, such as Moses and Jeremiah, Jonah and others, especially among the Jews, a most obstinate, blasphemous, and contradicting people, wearying both teacher and teaching with their envy. Here we need courage. Now also our name has a bad reputation; all calamities are traced to us; we are charged with the insurrection that was instigated by others; and whatever explanation we give, whatever we do to ease the situation, there is nobody to hear us. The Lord thinks that hardly anyone is to be found to condemn this nation with its counterfeit righteousness and with teaching that is not sound and does not cleanse hearts, because he would soon have to be killed by that people. Indeed, God Himself will have to employ His glory and majesty and expose His name to blasphemy if He wants us to prevail. So great is the perversity and corruption of nature. But behold, Isaiah was ready. He is very courageous after he has risen from the dead, has been strengthened by the burning coal, and has been made a different man, so that he is ready to hazard his life for God’s sake. (Luther)

for us. The heavenly King speaks in the divine council. As a true prophet, Isaiah is made privy to that council, as were Micaiah (1Ki 22:19–20) and Jeremiah (23:18, 22). Cf. Ge 1:26; 11:7; Am 3:7. (CSB)

God, who “is one” (Dt 6:4), speaks in the first person plural (cf Gn 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). While “us” might refer to God and the seraphim, it more likely refers to God’s triune nature. God is calling Isaiah to represent Him to the people. (TLSB)

Here am I. Newly forgiven, the once-fearful Isaiah (v 5) is now bold and eager. (TLSB)

In thankfulness, Isaiah was ready to do whatever God asked for, even though God had not yet declared what exactly Isaiah was to do. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

Isaiah responds without hesitation. The same person who just a moment before was filled with fear and a sense of his own sinful shortcomings now exhibits courage in embracing his call to go for the Holy One of Israel. What caused this transformation? Forgiveness and the realization that God wanted to use him produces Isaiah's reply. Forgiveness has worked a miracle inside the prophet. Courage has replaced fear. Willingness replaced a sense of unworthiness. God has worked this miracle "to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). And Isaiah volunteered without knowing anything about his call. He expresses his willingness to go no matter what tasks the Lord has in store for him. (PBC)

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 14:12b-20

12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. 13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

14:12 *eager for manifestations of the Spirit.* Lit, "zealots of the spirits." Some manuscripts have "zealots of the spiritual gifts," which probably gives the sense. However, cf Is 11:2; Rv 1:4. (TLSB)

excel in building up the church. The basic principle of ch. 14. (CSB)

perisseuate – To be rich in or have an abundance of, or abound in. This also reminds us that we will not be perfect in this and that we need to keep on growing by being in the Word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

oikodoma – This literally means the construction or building of something. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Paul urges that they prefer to be considered as influential instructors about the spiritual life. Paul urges them again to make the up-building of the church their highest priority. There is no place in the church for showing off one's gifts for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. If gifts do not edify they do not matter. (CC p. 481)

14:13 *power to interpret* – *diermeveuo* – To translate from human language to another. The theme of this whole section is that what gifts we have are useful for the whole body. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Lit, "pray so that he may interpret." Interpretation was a spiritual activity that should follow speaking in a tongue. (TLSB)

Paul has established the principle that what benefits the church is edification, or upbuilding. With a strong “therefore” (14:13), he begins to spell out how tongues-speakers may begin to make themselves more helpful to the church. As he does so, it becomes apparent that in asking them to seek excellence in building up the church, he is not throwing them back on their own spiritual exercises or ethical resources. No, he means that they should lift up their hearts to God in prayer. Just as Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13), so Paul encourages these saints to pray for a specific gift of the Spirit. It is by prayer that they are to “strive for the gracious gifts that are greater” (1 Cor 12:31). This does not mean that Christians may *demand* a particular gift. In his divine freedom, “the one and the same Spirit” distributes “to each one individually *as he [the Spirit] wishes*” (12:11). But the Corinthian tongues-speakers urgently needed to be freed from their self-centered preoccupation and begin thinking of others. To that end, therefore, each should “pray that he may interpret/translate” (14:13) the language into the vernacular of the listeners. Then he will no longer sound like a “foreigner” (14:11) to his fellow Christians, but as someone who can be genuinely helpful. (CC)

As long as he only prays in a tongue, he will only edify himself (see 14:4). That is because only his inner being, or “spirit,” is engaged in the activity (14:14). Filled with the Holy Spirit, he is speaking about the Gospel in other languages as the Spirit inspires his spirit to give utterance (as in Acts 2:4). But since his rational mind is “in neutral”—not engaged with his spirit—he is unable to communicate that spiritual utterance in meaningful terms in the language(s) known by the listeners. (CC)

As a result, the apostle is resolved to pray and sing not only with his spirit but also with his mind and faculties of understanding (1 Cor 14:15). Again it becomes evident that tongues-speaking was not primarily a form of teaching, directed to human beings, but consisted of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving addressed to God (“I will pray,” “I will sing,” 14:15; cf. Acts 2:11; 10:46; 1 Cor 14:2). Nevertheless, as exalted and worthy as such expressions may be, Paul determines to set an example by ensuring that in public worship anything he says in a tongue will be translated for the congregation’s benefit. (CC)

On the basis of Eph 5:19 (“speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”), one commentator underlines Paul’s insistence that

vocal utterances in worship must be mutually edifying (1 Cor 14:1–19). ... Just as in [Eph] 4:2, 32 love and forgiveness are shown by the Christians to “one another,” so in [Eph] 5:19 “singing” is part of the mutual edification of the saints. ... This means not only that its special place is in common worship (not excluding the family), but also that it has to be so qualified that the faith, obedience, love, and joy of fellow Christians are stimulated and increased. The singer’s private pleasure alone, not to speak of ancient or modern exhibits, cannot be its primary purpose. (CC)

Many a Christian could testify how his faith and joy have been increased by the hymn singing of others. (CC)

If the tongues-speaker persists in praising God only in spirit, it will be impossible for anyone not conversant with that foreign prayer-language to adopt and affirm the prayer as his own with the “amen” (1 Cor 14:16). Paul’s expression for someone not conversant with the tongue is ὁ ἰδιώτης, a person who is inexperienced or incompetent in a certain skill. The word is used in Acts 4:13, where Peter and John are classed as ἰδιῶται (“laymen”) in comparison with the rabbis, and 2 Cor 11:6, where Paul calls himself an ἰδιώτης (“inexpert”) in speech. The outsiders in Corinth (1 Cor

14:16) possessed other gifts of grace, as do all Christians (1:4–7), but could make no sense of uninterpreted tongues. The tongues-speakers may have been showing off their talents by the way they said the table grace/eucharistic prayer before the congregational meals which served as the setting for the Lord’s Supper (11:17–22). (CC)

No matter how fine the speaker’s thanksgiving may be, if it is in a language unknown to others, the only person to be edified is the speaker himself (14:17; cf. 14:4). The others receive no spiritual benefit—no edification—because the speaker’s only concern is his private conversation with God. (CC)

Paul then clarifies in 14:18 that he is not protesting this misuse of tongues from a sense of “sour grapes.” Rather, Paul is thankful to God for enriching him with this gift beyond anyone else in Corinth. Nonetheless, he does not want to parade this gift. While it has its place in private prayer and praise, Paul prefers to concentrate on what counts “in church” (14:19), what builds up the body of Christ. To that end, he regards it as infinitely more helpful to speak five intelligible words with his mind fully engaged—words in the common language that also engage the minds of the hearers—in order to instruct others in the faith, rather than countless words that are meaningless to the hearers. As one commentator put it, “It is better to be useful than brilliant.” (CC)

This is not to advocate a “dumbing down” of the church’s language, and even less an abandonment of the church’s biblical standards and heritage of liturgical worship. When people do not comprehend biblical and ecclesiastical language (cf. “the outsider” in 14:16), what is needed is catechesis, which Paul calls interpretation and/or translation (διερμηνεύω, 12:30; 14:5, 13, 27). Luther considered the pulpit an appropriate place for such catechesis:

When we are in the pulpit, we should nurse people and give them milk to drink; for a new church is growing up daily which needs to know the first principles. Therefore one should not hesitate to teach the Catechism diligently and to distribute its milk. The lofty speculations and matters should be reserved for the wiseacres. I will not consider Drs. Pomeranus, Jonas, and Philipp while I am preaching; for they know what I am presenting better than I do. Nor do I preach to them, but to my little Hans and Elizabeth. ... Therefore see to it that you preach purely and simply and have regard for the unlearned people, and do not address only one or the other. (CC)

Paul begins to spell out how tongue-speakers may begin to make themselves more helpful to the church. As he does so, it becomes apparent that in asking them to seek to excellence in building up the church, he is not throwing them back on their own spiritual exercises or ethical resources. No, he means that they should lift up their hearts to God in prayer. Just as Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), so Paul encourages these saints to pray for a specific gift of the Spirit. This does not mean that Christians may demand a particular gift. The Corinthian tongues-speakers urgently needed to be freed from their self-centered preoccupation and begin thinking of others. To that end, therefore, each should “pray that he may interpret/translate” the language into the vernacular of the listeners. Then he will no longer sound like a “foreigner” (14:11) to his fellow Christians, but as someone who can be genuinely helpful. (CC p. 484)

14:14 *mind is unfruitful.* † When a person speaks in tongues or prays in tongues, the human mind does not produce the language and is not involved. (CSB)

Ritual language is known for its conservative tendencies. E.g., we still pray “Our Father,” quote Bible passages, or sing hymns and liturgy in seventeenth-century English (KJV); immigrant communities typically use their heritage language and their new language alongside each other in worship settings, even when the meaning of their heritage language is being lost (linguists refer to this as “language shift”). Records of ritual conservatism, multiple languages in worship, and the confusion they caused are known from the Jerusalem temple and from Palestinian Judaism (Sotah 7:1–2; Megillah 2:1). Paul gives evidence of ritually conservative language at Corinth as well. (TLSB)

If the person’s mind is in neutral – not engaged with his spirit – he is unable to communicate that spiritual utterance in meaningful terms in the language(s) known by the listeners. (CC p. 485)

14:15–17 *pray ... sing ... praising God ... say “Amen”... thanksgiving.* Elements employed in OT (1Ch 16:36; Ne 5:13; 8:6; Ps 104:33; 136:1; 148:1) and NT worship (Ro 11:36; Eph 5:18–20). “Amen,” meaning “It is true” or “So be it,” is the believer’s confession of agreement with the words spoken (cf. Gal 1:5). Thus it is important that a message in tongues be interpreted. (CSB)

14:15 *pray with my spirit ... with my mind ... sing with my spirit ... with my mind.* May mean that Paul will sometimes pray or sing with his spirit in a tongue; at other times he will pray or sing with his mind in his own language. Others believe that Paul was declaring his intention to pray or sing with both mind and spirit at the same time. (CSB)

Lit, “pray in the spirit ... in the mind.” Paul displayed his thoughts as an example for the readers to follow. At church, a person might pray personally for spiritual edification or understandably for the edification of others. Paul resolved to live with both practices. He displayed such resolve in other conflicting situations, using similar expressions about “spirit” and “mind”: in Rm 7:25, he described the inner conflict over following God’s Word and following the sinful nature; in Rm 8:16, the Holy Spirit bears witness “with our spirit” against the spirit of slavery and fear. With these expressions, Paul describes feeling torn, but persists in what he knows is right and best. He acknowledges the congregation’s selfish practice while emphasizing his main point: speak in an understandable way at church. “The adversaries have a long speech about the use of the Latin language in the Mass. In this speech, they joke about how it benefits an unlearned hearer to hear, in the faith of the Church, a Mass that he does not understand” (Ap XXIV 2). (TLSB)

Again it becomes evident that tongues-speaking was not primarily a form of teaching, directed to human beings, but consisted of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving addressed to God. Nevertheless, as exalted and worthy as such expressions may be, Paul determines to set an example by ensuring that in public worship anything he says in a tongue will be translated for the congregation’s benefit. (CC p. 485)

14:16 *give thanks ... thanksgiving.* Different Gk terms: *eulogeo*, “to praise,” “bless” God in prayer (as in Eng “eulogy”); *eucharistia*, “gratitude,” “a prayer of thanksgiving” (as in Eng “Eucharist”). Paul may have in mind specific liturgical prayers, such as the Eighteen Benedictions that were used in first-century Jewish synagogues. (TLSB)

he does not know – idiotai – Uninstructed. We would call them the catechumens. They participated in the worship service but if they did not understand then they would not be instructed. Paul reminds us that the prime concern of worship is to proclaim clearly the Good News of Jesus Christ. Everyone, including children and visitors should be able to understand what is done during the worship service. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Commonly, a person who was not an expert. Here, a layperson or someone new to the church is likely meant. In v 23 “outsider” is paired with “unbeliever.” (TLSB)

say “*Amen*.” Proper liturgical response to prayer in synagogue and church. John Chrysostom: “If you shall bless in a barbarian tongue, not knowing what you say, nor able to interpret, the layman cannot respond the Amen. For not hearing the words, ‘forever and ever,’ which are at the end [of a prayer], he does not say the Amen” (TLSB)

14:17 *being built up* – oikodomeitai – It is from the same root as “built up” in verse 12. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

No matter how fine the speaker’s thanksgiving may be, if it is in a language unknown to others, the only person to be edified is the speaker himself. The others receive no spiritual benefit – no edification – because the speaker’s only concern is his private conversation with God. (CC p. 486)

14:18 *I speak in tongues more than all of you* – Paul clarifies in this verse that he is not protesting this misuse of tongues from a sense of sour grapes. Rather, Paul is thankful to God for enriching him with this gift beyond anyone else in Corinth. (CC p. 486)

Paul boasted rhetorically to show the Corinthians that the activity they valued so highly was common. John Chrysostom: “This he does also in another place intending, namely, to take away the advantages of Judaism and to show that henceforth they are nothing, he begins by declaring that [he] himself had been endowed with them” (NPNF 1 12:211). Cf 2Co 11:21–23. (TLSB)

14:19 *But in the church*. † Some believe that an interpretation is unnecessary when the gift of tongues is being used as a private prayer language. They base such a distinction on v. 18 (see v. 14) when compared with the phrase quoted here. Others think Paul is very forcefully emphasizing the importance of understanding the message spoken in church, rather than making a distinction between public and private. (CSB)

five words with my mind. More rhetoric, emphasizing the need for meaningful communication. “Not only has Paul commanded that a language understood by the people be used in church (1 Corinthians 14:2, 9), but human law has also commanded it” (AC XXIV 4). (TLSB)

Nonetheless, he does not want to parade this gift. While it has its place in private prayer and praise, Paul prefers to concentrate on what counts in church, what builds up the body of Christ. To that end, he regards it as infinitely more helpful to speak five intelligible words with his mind fully engaged – words in the common language that also engage the minds of the hearer – in order to instruct others in the faith, rather than countless words that are meaningless to the hearers. As one commentator put it, “It is better to be useful than brilliant.” (CC 486)

4:20 Before presenting one final argument regarding the comparative superiority of prophecy over tongues, Paul pauses for a moment and appeals to his “brothers” (14:20) to take a more mature approach. To be concerned for the edification of Christ’s body is a mark of mature thinking. But to be concerned with vain and competitive displays of one’s spiritual prowess through tongues-speaking, with no thought for the effect on fellow believers, is a mark of childishness. Paul wants the Corinthians to press on to the maturity of Christian thought which characterizes the veteran of the cross (see 2:6; 3:1–3). At the same time, they should have the innocence of children as far as wickedness is concerned (cf. Rom 16:19). They should not be

experienced in the wickedness which plagued the city and constantly tempted the church (cf. 1 Cor 5:8; 10:6; and Paul's final appeal in 15:32–34). (CC)

be infants in evil. Just as in the case of infants, have no evil desires or wrong motives in wanting to excel in spiritual gifts (such as speaking in tongues) as an end in itself. (CSB)

A proverbial saying. Paul did not suggest that infants are innocent of sin (Rm 3:23; 5:12). Augustine: "In the weakness of the infant's limbs, and not in its will, lies its innocency" (NPNF 1 1:48). (TLSB)

Paul pauses for a moment and appeals for the brothers to take a more mature approach. To be concerned for the edification of Christ's body is a mark of mature thinking. But to be concerned with vain and competitive displays of one's spiritual prowess though tongues-speaking, with no thought for the effect on fellow believers, is a mark of childishness. Paul wants the Corinthians to press on to the maturity of Christian thought which characterizes the veteran of the cross. At the same time, they should have an innocence of children as far as wickedness is concerned (cf Rom 16:19). They should be experienced in the wickedness which plagued the city and constantly tempted the church. (CC p. 489)

GOSPEL Luke 5:1-11

The Calling of the First Disciples

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Up to this point Luke has pictured Jesus as going it alone in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. He seems to have no companions as He makes His way through the synagogues. If we had only the Gospel of Mark, the call of the first disciples would appear to be something "out of the blue" (Mark 1:16-20). But by reading the Gospels of Luke and John we realize that Jesus and the first disciples were rather well acquainted even before their call to follow. In the previous section we heard how Jesus had gone to the home of Simon and healed His mother-in-law. When now He makes use of Simon's boat, it does not seem at all strange. Simon was simply returning a favor. (PBC)

5:1 *one occasion* – This passage must be seen in view of 4:43, which immediately precedes it, i.e., that Jesus’ teaching in the boat and the miraculous catch of fish are part of Jesus’ necessity to “proclaim as Good News the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I was sent.” Although Peter appeared briefly in connection with the healing of his mother-in-law, this is the first passage in Luke’s gospel where Jesus interacts with his future disciples. Peter will now respond to Jesus’ pattern of teaching and performing miracles and will enter into the kingdom of God and its preaching when Jesus calls him to be a “catcher of men alive.” (CC)

Luke sets the stage well by introducing us to the participants (Jesus, the fishermen, and the crowds) and the place (a boat on the lake of Gennesaret). The setting is catechetical: the main action is the teaching and hearing of the Word of God through Jesus. Peter will be called in this passage to be a hearer of the Word—a disciple or catechumen—and to continuously hear the Word of God from Jesus. There is no time reference except the implicit reference to morning in Peter’s description of their lack of success after having worked hard all night (5:5). Fishing at night in the darkness, the fishermen caught nothing. But night is over; the Dawn has appeared in Galilee (cf. Is 9:1–2). From this moment on Peter and the disciples will live in the light, where the “fishing” is good because they abide in the presence of Christ. (CC)

Lake of Gennesaret. Luke is the only one who calls it a lake. The other Gospel writers call it the Sea of Galilee, and John twice calls it the Sea of Tiberias (Jn 6:1; 21:1). (CSB)

Usually called the Sea of Galilee; also called the Sea of Tiberias. (TLSB)

παρὰ τὴν λίμνην Γεννησαρέτ—The lake Gennesaret is the Sea of Galilee. Luke’s geography is very accurate, for Jesus moves easily from Capernaum to the shores of Galilee. (CC)

crowd was pressing in on him – It was impossible for Him to avoid the crowds that gathered whenever His presence was announced by some one that saw Him. Here a multitude pressed upon Him, whose eagerness for the Word of God is mentioned. (Kretzmann)

to hear – ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ—In the early Christian church, a technical term for a catechumen was a “hearer of the Word.” Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition* from around A.D. 215 offers an example (G. J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* [Bramcote, England: Grove, 1976] 17): “And when those who are to receive baptism are chosen, let their life be examined. ... Have they done every kind of good work? And when those who brought them bear witness to each: ‘He has’, let them hear the gospel.” One who “hears the gospel” (a technical term) was a catechumen, who, after three years of instruction, was enrolled in the final stage of catechesis before Baptism. (CC)

Certainly the highly structured catechetical regimen described by Hippolytus and other early church fathers was developed after Luke’s time. However, Luke’s gospel itself offers clues about the beginnings of such catechetical procedures and terminology. Those who were Jesus’ original “hearers” or who were “hearing” or “listening to the word(s)” of Jesus could be called “hearers,” “learners,” “students,” “disciples,” or even “catechumens,” and the NT bears witness to the start of formal catechesis already in the NT era; see comments on κατηχήθης, “catechized,” in Lk 1:4. In fact, μαθητής, “disciple,” denotes one who regularly listens to, learns from, and follows a teacher or rabbi. “To hear,” ἀκούω, is used in the Sermon on the Plain and marks its catechetical nature (6:27, 47, 49). In other significant places “hearer(s)” of Jesus’ words or those who come “to hear” may be those in the initial stage of becoming disciples or catechumens. (CC)

Luke contains nine references to “hearing” Jesus’ “word(s)” (ἀκούω and λόγος): 5:1, 15; 6:47; 8:12, 13, 15, 21; 10:39; 11:28. Particularly in the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus will stress that it is not enough merely to “hear” his Word; one must hear and also “do” it (ποιέω, 6:47, 49; 8:21) or “keep” it (φυλάσσω, 11:28; also Jn 12:47). Cf. Mary “keeping” or “treasuring” words about Jesus (ῥήματα and compounds of τηρέω) in Lk 2:19, 51 and the Johannine theme of “keeping” Jesus’ “Word” (τηρέω and λόγος in Jn 8:51, 52, 55; 14:23, 24; 15:20; 17:6). (CC)

An important part of the background of NT and early church language about “hearing” Jesus’ Word is found in the Torah, and in particular in Deuteronomy, where the verb שמע occurs some ninety-two times, usually denoting the hearing of God’s words by the Israelites. But the verb does not simply mean “to hear.” *Most of the time it means “to hear in faith,” and therefore “to believe and to put into practice.”* Typical is the thought of Deut 4:1: “And now, O Israel, *hear* the statutes and statements of justice that I am teaching you *to do so that you may live.*” As with Jesus in the NT, it is not the mere hearing of the Word that effects salvation, but *hearing in faith—faith that is created in the heart by that same Word of God, faith that is active in works, and faith by which one inherits the promises in the Word.* Noteworthy in this regard is Deut 6:4: “Hear, O Israel, Yahweh your God, Yahweh is one,” which really means, “*Believe, O Israel, that Yahweh your God is one.*” “To hear” means “to believe.” The Gospel import of “to hear” is reinforced by Deut 11:13–15, 18–25, where as a result of hearing, the Israelites love Yahweh and receive the blessings of his grace. (CC pp. 203,204)

the word of God – τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ—The Word of God is a Lukan expression for the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, i.e., the Gospel. The genitive τοῦ θεοῦ is subjective, i.e., the Word is *from* God and is *God’s* Word (rather than just being “about God”). (CC p 204)

The preaching of Jesus comes first; everything else that happens in the passage is the result of His word. This preaching takes place in a setting of water and boats and nets. The technical vocabulary of fishing is scattered throughout this periscope, suggesting that the hearer take seriously the image of fishing as a metaphor for the work of Jesus and His disciples. (CC p. 206)

5:2 washing their nets. After each period of fishing, the nets were washed, stretched and prepared for use again. (CSB)

Regular task for fishermen such as Peter, Andrew, James, and John. (TLSB)

The nets were usually washed after a catch of fish, so it is surprising that the disciples would be washing the nets if they had not caught any fish. “Net” is used four times here, and only in this pericope in Luke. It is the boundary between being loose in the water or being caught and in the boat. As one is brought from one status to another, i.e., from being loose to being caught, the transition is effected by a miracle that testifies to God’s presence. In this case, the miracle is that the nets that could find no fish now find an overabundance of fish *because of the word of Jesus.* The nets are being cleaned, even though they have not been dirtied by fish, so that they might be ready to serve as the vehicle for God’s miraculous work in his new creation. The nets are the means by which one is brought into the church. The nets are put into the water at Jesus’ word. Thus Luke configures his opening to the passage with references to the preaching of Jesus (5:1, 3). Entrance into the boat where Jesus is present must be through the nets, the preaching of the kingdom of God. The pericope is about “catching men alive”—through the ministry of the means of grace. This is what establishes the church. (CC p. 207)

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boats – The first word of this sort is “boats” (πλοῖα). Note the movement of Jesus with respect to the boats: Jesus sees the boats (5:2), goes down into a boat (5:3), and uses the boat for teaching (5:3). The boats receive the great catch of fish (5:7), and then are left behind when Peter, James, and John follow Jesus (5:11). Momentarily, the boat becomes the place where Christ proclaims the kingdom and where the miraculous results of his teaching are contained. Compare Noah, who was saved through a boat as a type of Holy Baptism (1 Pet 3:20–21). Because Christ is present in the boat, it becomes a symbol of the church, where Christ's teaching and miracles take place and where believers are gathered. Luther sees it this way when he says: “It is our comfort, however, that Christ, through our preaching, will lead his own into the boat.” The church also had this in mind when it named the part of the sanctuary called the “nave”—Latin for “boat” or “ship.” (CC)

Indeed, the pericope is moving toward Jesus' commission to Peter to be a “catcher of men alive.” The miracle is about the church and how the church comes into existence through preaching. Here Luther captures the significance of all the imagery: the sea is the world, the fish are people, the net is the preaching of the Gospel, and the boat is the church. And so it is no coincidence that Luke reports that the disciples were washing their nets (ἔπλυνον τὰ δίκτυα). Why this small tidbit of information on the fishing practices of Galilean fishermen? (CC pp. 206,207)

The nave is main part of our church where the Word and Sacraments are shared and where Christ is present with his gifts. Nave means “boat” or “ship.” The sea is the world, the fish are the people, the net is the Gospel and the boat is the church. We are to throw the net out there as a type of life saver and help bring people into the boat/church.

5:3 which was Simon's – The miracle itself is structured around the dialog between Simon Peter and Jesus. Peter had been introduced into the narrative at the healing of his mother-in-law (4:38) but was incidental to the story. In the miraculous catch of fish, Peter is a central figure (5:3, 4, 5, 8, 10). This is the story of his call by Jesus. It is not without significance that it is Peter's boat into which Jesus enters in order to teach. Peter is from the beginning of the gospel first among the Twelve. (CC)

put out a little from the land. Allowed Jesus some freedom from the press of the crowd, which made Him easier to see and to hear. (TLSB)

sat down. The usual position for teaching. The boat provided an ideal arrangement, removed from the press of the crowd but near enough to be seen and heard. (CSB)

taught the people – ἐδίδασκεν—Jesus' teaching on the boat continues his pattern of proclamation and miracles. This teaching must have had as significant an impact on Peter as the miracle. Luther rightly accents the impact of the sermon on Peter: “Peter is to become a different man; and a greater miracle is to be wrought in him than in the draught of fishes. The sermon which Christ had previously preached from the boat now first began to have its effect upon him”

(*Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John N. Lenker, trans. J. Lenker et al., vol. 4 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983] 156). (CC p. 204)

5:4 *into the deep* – Jesus asks Peter to do something that defies all human logic: after a long night of fishing without success to go back out into the deep and let down his nets to fish. In the OT, the depths of the sea have the connotations of chaos, evil and death. (CC p. 208)

5:5 *master* – This is title unique to Luke. It means “chief,” “commander.” An address of respect. Later, Peter will acclaim Jesus with more exalted titles, such as “Lord” (v. 8) and “the Christ of God” (9:20). (TLSB)

toiled all night – Night fishing often yields good results. On this night, however, they had no success. (TLSB)

He does not register an objection, but merely states as a fact that they have worked hard all night and have caught nothing. They had plied their trade at the time and under the conditions which experience had shown them to be the most favorable, at night, and on the benches of the lake not far from the shore. (Kretzmann)

BECAUSE YOU SAY SO – Peter moves into this dark unknown at the word of Jesus. His subsequent following of Jesus “on a path unknown is therefore a logical progression for one who had already ‘put out into the deep’ on the basis of a word only.” Peter has been struck by Jesus’ teaching from the boat about the kingdom and therefore lowers his nets at Jesus’ word. (CC p. 208)

5:6 *large number of fish* – The word of Jesus creates the great catch of fish. Contrary to Peter’s expectation, Jesus shows him that fish are in abundance – in places where one least expects. Here Jesus’ action as the Creator overcomes Peter’s doubt. As in the feeding of the five thousand, when the Creator comes to his creation to recreate, there is always abundance. The abundance of fish is a foretaste of the success of the Gospel mission. Even though the nets appear ready to break, they remain firm and accomplish the task of bringing the fish into the boat, as will the proclamation of the Gospel. (CC)

Likely the comb, or musht, fish, the only large fish in Galilee that moves in shoals. Some 30 varieties of fish now live in the lake. (TLSB)

5:7 *their partners*. Four of Jesus most important apostles were two pairs of brothers: Simon Peter and Andrew; and James and John (sons of Zebedee). They may have run a sizable fishing business. (TLSB)

Luther’s suggestion is provocative:

“This draught of fishes is so great that the one boat alone (hitherto representing the Church of the Jewish people) is not able to draw it up or large enough to contain it. Those in the boat must beckon to their partners in the other to come and help them. This other boat is the assembly and Church of the Gentiles which has been established and spread by the Apostles. Thus were the two boats filled with one and the same draught of fishes, that is, with one and the same sort of preaching, and a corresponding faith and confession.” (CC p. 208)

There is a pattern of mission suggested by this movement from one boat where Christ and Peter are to boats of other apostles (carrying out the same work). In the early church, Christian gathered in house churches. When a house church (fifty to a hundred people) reached full capacity and was overflowing, a group of the baptized split off from that church and formed another house church in another house (another boat). The foundation of this house would be those who had been hearers of the Word and had been brought across the boundary between paganism and Christianity through the net of preaching, catechesis, and Baptism. These were always Eucharistic communities of the baptized, who would then go out fishing for those who were lost in the deep and needed to be brought over that same boundary in the same net. (CC pp. 208-209)

5:8 Simon Peter – Σίμων Πέτρος—By giving Peter’s two names here in the context of his call by Jesus, the evangelist follows Matthew (4:18) and emphasizes Peter’s place of leadership among the twelve apostles. He is “the rock.” (CC)

depart from me. The nearer one comes to God, the more he feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness—as did Abraham (Ge 18:27), Job (42:6) and Isaiah (6:5). (CSB)

Peter shrinks back in holy fear. God’s purity and power highlights Peter’s weakness and sin. (TLSB)

As in the infancy narrative, where the presence of God moves from the temple to the person of Jesus, the evangelist is suggesting to the hearer that there is a shift here in the location of the presence of God. He is now in the boat! Peter wants Jesus to leave because Peter is a sinner. Whole drawn to Jesus through the miracle, Peter also wants Jesus to depart from him, because he knows he is unworthy to be in Jesus’ presence. Awe has gripped Peter – indeed everyone who saw the great catch. (James and John are named in particular.) (CC p. 209)

5:10 do not be afraid – With Jesus at our side there is nothing to fear when we go about doing his work.

Jesus’ response is His word of absolution to Peter. The miracle of bringing fish into the boat is the miracle of making the unworthy sinner fit to stay in the presence of the holy God. It is the miracle of the forgiveness of sins (cf. Isaiah’ similar reaction and the absolution that enabled him to serve as a prophet [Is 6:1-8]). The miracle of forgiveness will be celebrated in the next three passages of this section. (CC p. 209)

catching men – Jesus says, “From now on you will be catching men alive.”

Not only does Christ give comfort to poor, terror-stricken Peter by the kindly words in which he declares and offers to him his grace and absolution, but he goes on to strengthen this comfort by the great promise that he will give him something far beyond anything he has hitherto received from him. ... “From henceforth,” Christ says, “thou shalt catch men.” That Peter is not to be alarmed on account of his unworthiness and sins is, in itself, an abundant comfort and grace. However, he is not only to have the forgiveness of his sins, but is also to know that God intends to accomplish still greater things through him by making him a help and comfort to others.

In Peter’s call there is both absolution and a commission to extend that absolution to others (see comments at 22:28–30). (CC)

Only Luke uses ζωγγρέω, which means “to capture alive” (from ἀγγρέω “to catch” and ζώος “alive”). The point of comparison is in the transition from one status to another, from swimming loose in the deep to being caught and in the boat with Jesus. To catch fish, one needs a net and a boat; to catch people alive one needs absolution from Jesus and the commission to absolve others. To capture people alive is to declare to them the kingdom of God in Jesus (4:43) and bring them into that kingdom through catechesis, Baptism, and Eucharist. Peter’s commission to catch people alive is to go out and do what Jesus has just done to him, i.e., to preach the kingdom and absolve. This is how the church is created and formed and preserved. (CC pp. 209 – 210)

Lit, “become a fisher of men.” Peter would henceforth gather mortal men into everlasting life rather than hunt and kill fish. (TLSB)

5:11 *left everything and followed him.* This was not the first time these men had been with Jesus (see Jn 1:40–42; 2:1–2). Their periodic and loose association now became a closely knit fellowship as they followed the Master. The scene is the same as Mt 4:18–22 and Mk 1:16–20, but the accounts relate events from different hours of the morning. (CSB)

Fishing often brought an above average income, so these disciples left behind considerable assets. (TLSB)

ἀφέντες πάντα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτόν—The plural ἀφέντες suggests that Peter, James, and John are included in this act of discipleship. To leave everything and follow Jesus is the sign of discipleship. Levi the tax collector will do the same thing as a sign that he is going to follow Jesus as a disciple (5:28). (CC p. 205)

Luke concludes the call of Peter by showing that Jesus’ absolution was received in faith, for Peter and some of the others perform their first act of discipleship. Because Jesus is moving on, the church goes with him, and these newly called disciples desire to be with Jesus. The focus of Luke’s ecclesiology is now clearly on Jesus, the Anointed One; the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom; and Peter, the first disciple called and the first among the Twelve. (CC p. 210)

5:1–11 A miraculous catch of fish shows the disciples that Jesus is more than a great teacher—God is working mightily through Him. Like the disciples, the mundane struggle for daily bread, and the sin and doubt it fosters, may make you feel distant from God. But He is ever near and also ever prepared to forgive your sins. • Stay with me, Lord, for I am a sinful person. Grant me repentance and a new life in service to You. Amen. (TLSB)