

Being Called

Isaiah 6:1-8; I Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11; Psalm 138, 2-04-07

Poor Punxsutawney Phil, and others of his species, were rudely awakened on Friday and called or pulled forth from their cozy dens to make a prediction for the future—would there be six more weeks of winter, or more? Some of these furry little creatures indicated there would be an early spring others indicated there wouldn't. Phil, in case you missed all the hoopla, said there would be an early spring. After being called into action the poor little beasties probably curled up and went back to sleep until a more proper time came along to end their hibernation. These little animals are viewed as prophets, of sorts, of the coming time.

While there can be no comparison between a groundhog and a prophet in Old Testament times, both are called into action in their lives. One major difference is that the prophets of the Old and New Testaments are called into active duty by God to awaken people to long-term problems and solutions. People called by God are stirred from their former lives when the time is right.

It was the proper time for Isaiah to enter the service of God when he had his wonderful and frightening vision. He resisted, but God reassured him that he was the one being sought to serve his Creator. By the time the most intense part of his vision was over, he was able to say, with certainty, "Here I am Lord, send me." Isaiah, as we know, went on to become one of the major prophets of our tradition. There is more than one author of the book of Isaiah, but the message remains fairly consistent through the book's pages. The nation Israel need to clean up its act and follow the rules God has set forth for it. Later, a Messiah would be sent to the nation to guide it into the future.

Some thought that person was Jesus but we can be pretty certain those disciples who simply picked up their lives to follow him were not counted among them, at first. They were simple fishermen who willingly went along with this itinerant preacher leaving all behind. We can imagine this must have caused comment in their village as well as some consternation in their families. We know that at least Peter was married because his mother-in-law is mentioned in the gospels. Yet, here he is, just leaving hearth and home. Of course, there might have been some arrangements made for the families left behind, the task of the gospels is not to dwell on these details. The important thing to grasp is that people were so attracted to Jesus and his message that they had little trouble giving up all they had to follow him into a future of uncertainty.

It takes strength to respond to the call of God in such a positive way when God comes a-calling. It also takes tremendous trust and, perhaps, some innocence, for no one who accepts such a call knows just where it will take him or her.

Consider Paul. He was shipwrecked, jailed, or found himself in any number of small and large towns around the Mediterranean. He was one of those converts who become more devoted to a mission than those who have been born to it. He moved forward in trust and with a burning desire to spread the good news of the gospel, as he interpreted it, as far and wide as he could. Often people point to Paul as the reason our faith survived the early, difficult years. And they are right. But he knew he would not be around forever so, through his letters and visits he worked to ensure that others would hear the call of God and become committed to continuing the mission of spreading the gospel. Paul wanted to light a spark in the hearts and minds of those in Corinth by giving a brief re-telling of his history as a hard-working apostle. He made no excuses for what he had done or how he had done it, telling them all, "I am what I am." He sought to inspire them to move forward in faith and to understand that it was not an easy task before them.

So, what do we learn from the prophets, disciples and apostles who have gone before us? That the road before us is clearly marked by their examples and the teachings we find throughout our Bible. While we are what we are and the world is what it is, we are being called in many ways from our cozy dens of hibernation into the world to continue to spread the good news of God's love for all creation in the manner of his beloved Son. Amen