

## **Our stories, our call**

Will you pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing in your sight, oh God our strength and redeemer.

One issue that keeps me up at night is racial policy. I know that I wouldn't be here today if South Africa hadn't enforced affirmative action policy that ensured black people and people of color are hired and supported to thrive. This is one of many stories that drive my passion and commitment to racial justice and equity.

Over the past two months we have heard many such stories from many of you. The Greater Boston Interfaith Organization has invited their member congregations to embark on "listening sessions," where we have been asking people to share their justice concerns, as well as stories in their lives that have impacted the issues they care the most about. These concerns shared will feed into GBIO's focus areas for the coming year. One strong correlation was that for most people, the issues they care deeply about today are connected to their own personal experiences, or those of someone dear to them.

This tells us that our stories matter in knowing and understanding ourselves, and each other, in responding to our individual and collective sense of call, and how we might need to move in this world.

We know too in this past year, that it is in hearing the horrific stories of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, the stories of violent discrimination towards people of Asian descent, the stories of displacement and discrimination of Palestinians, that action and organizing began to take place, stories that we all know have been ongoing for years and years, and yet it was only in their sharing and retelling at scale that people could be held accountable. This is what is made possible when we share and listen to each others stories.

In today's passage we hear about Isaiah's vision and call story.

The glory of God, the voice of God, shakes things up, Isaiah in despair cries out for himself and his community, God responds with a question: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" and to this Isaiah responds: "Here am I. Send me."

We hear very similar responses in the call stories of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel  
But in this story in particular, Isaiah isn't called explicitly, but instead chooses, or volunteers himself

And sometimes this is how our calls unfold, we put our hands up  
In Isaiah's vision, he sees God sitting on a throne; he hears the calling of the seraphs; he smells the smoke; he feels the shaking of the temple; he tastes the live coal  
Isaiah's vision is all consuming, an embodiment of all of who he is  
And this is the very vision that led him to saying yes to a call from God  
Sometimes our visions can feel this way, too grand, too unrealistic, surreal.  
This might lead us to ask ourselves: do we have the courage to articulate our visions, and say yes to our call?

Responding to our visions, to our call can be difficult and hard  
Very soon after Isaiah's eager Yes!, we start to experience his uncertainty about a decision he made with haste, we feel his anxiety about doing this divine work, he now sounds very different faced with the reality of what the "hands and feet" of call look like.

In place of the words “Here am I. Send me,” we now hear him crying out, questioning: “How long oh God?” and perhaps wondering if God could have asked someone else instead! Doesn’t that happen to us sometimes, when there’s a call to action, and we so eagerly and readily to step up, then the reality of the work sets in, we are still called, and are now navigating the day-to-day realities of call, and sometimes the more we come to understand what this yes means we want out!

For us, this could look like saying yes to racial injustice, and yet the realities of unlearning, of writing emails and making phone calls to governors, of changing where we bank and buy, of altering our conversations with our friends and families, of acknowledging our confusion and not knowing, can feel tedious for some

We too can find ourselves crying out, “How long oh God? How long oh God?”

Despite this outcry in the hardship and working out of our call.

After Isaiah expressed his and the communities despair: “woe to me, I am ruined,” he can now hear God. God listens to his despair and invites him to do something.

This is the power of expressing our despair, of crying out, of sharing about our deep societal concerns, we can be listened to and change can happen.

In reflecting back on the listening sessions we had, some people said there was something very meaningful about knowing that the stories and issues that people shared will be heard and taken to heart to affect change.

Sharing our stories and the things that matter most to us is a deeply vulnerable action, we are telling people something important, meaningful, about us.

Our personal stories are important, sharing and understanding them gives us a sense of who we are and tells us about our call.

Our stories are an important way to know ourselves and others; they help us to articulate and share in our individual and collective visions, and in sharing we are reminded that we don’t have to carry the weight of our visions and callings alone

Someone in one of the listening sessions said in others bearing witness, in hearing another's pain and truths, it brings closeness and compassion, it reminds us that we are interconnected, and that we are not free until we are all free

In our day today, we are wrestling with answering God’s call for our time

We have been discerning and hearing the voice of God, to listen for the story that God is co-creating with us to create a more just world

This process of storying, is what allows us to begin to imagine and live into an alternate and new reality

These are some of the issues we have heard are of great importance to you: climate justice, equity and access in healthcare, access to quality education, police reform, immigration, and many of these issues intersect with racial justice. [Hold cloud up for a few seconds]

Howard Thurman says, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what **makes you come alive**. And then go **do** that. Because what the world needs is people who have **come alive**."

In our listening sessions, I can certainly attest to the stories that people shared that make them come alive.

When we take a look at the intersections of our stories, our call, our passions, our talents, our sense of purpose, we find life, we come alive

Jacqui Lewis says call stories, as varied and as many as there are, are stories of intersection, the intersection of God's care for and reconciliation of the world, and our individual and collective sense of being and purpose

As we listen, hear, share our stories, we are co-creating and co-authoring with God and each other to create the kind of world that will bring justice to many.

In Biblical stories, in hearing Isaiah's call story, in hearing the stories of those in our communities, we find ourselves in every telling and re-telling

In sharing our stories, we encounter the Holy, the overflowing glory of God, we deepen our relationship with God, our understanding and knowing of God, and how she is moving in our lives

Just as Isaiah heard the voice of God say to him: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

The voice of God is calling us today, what is it calling you into? What is it call us into? And will you go? Will we go?

"Here I am. Send me!"

Amen

May the road rise up to meet you

May the wind be ever at your back

May the sunshine grace your face

May the rain fall gently on your fields

Until we meet again dear friends,

May God keep you in the palm of her hands



A theologian, Willie Jennings says a crucial aspect of Christian existence and desire is buried inside the more mundane sense of what it means to be a Christian, he says: “there is within Christianity a breathtakingly powerful way to imagine and enact connection and belonging.” Saying yes to God, an act of belonging. Jennings invites to engage our Christian imaginations In today’s text, as hear Isaiah share his vision with us, our Christian imaginations

As we listen, hear, share our stories, we are co-creating Our stories have meaning for ourselves, families, our communities and the world, they are an important way we know ourselves and others, they help us remember who we are, and re-member ourselves