

Are You Good Enough to Make God's Team?

Sermon for Sunday, January 10, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11

I've got some bad news.

Thinking ahead to our Annual Meeting coming up soon, I looked over the list of people who serve on various committees in our congregation. I'm sad to report that we're going to have to replace all of those people. None of them are eligible to be in those positions. I'm sorry to do this, but I have to. It wouldn't be right to allow this to continue. We'll have to start all over, looking for new people.

If this was a political convention, it might be different. At those things, you expect to find under-the-table deals, vote buying in the back rooms, and so on. When the riding association holds the meeting to choose the candidate for the next election, you might find the room crowded with people who were bussed in from outside.

But this isn't a political convention. *This is the church of God!* God is pure and holy. Those who wish to be servants of God's church must also be pure and holy. But we aren't. So we can't. None of the people on this list is acceptable. Not one.

I hope you don't take this personally. You see, it's not just you. I'm in the same boat. I stand up here to preach God's word — who do I think I'm fooling? Long ago, in another place of worship, Isaiah realized the same thing about himself. So did Peter, in the fishing boat.

How would you feel if you were in the very presence of God? What do you mean, "if"? *You are in the presence of God!* Right now! We have gathered here in the name of Jesus Christ; we have prayed to God to be with us; the Holy Spirit is alive in us. God is here.

I've seen boys in trouble at school who are sent to the principal's office. The ones who pretend they're tough swagger in like it's a big joke. You don't swagger before God. You tremble. You fall on your knees, or even flat on the floor.

It's not that we're such wicked people. From what I know of you, you're all pretty decent people. I like to think I am, too. It's just that God is *so* good, we can't even come close. In the blazing light of God's holiness, even the little things we do that are wrong show up for what they are: sin.

I'm trying to paint a picture of what happens when people who are sinful come face to face with God who is holy. This is what went through Peter's mind that morning when Jesus used his boat to speak to the crowd. Some of Jesus' disciples were obviously from a tainted background, such as a tax collector or a prostitute. But Peter could have been any one of us.

Peter may have been impressed at the power of Jesus' words, and admired him as a great teacher. But there are lots of great teachers in every age. It was later, when they let down their nets—grudgingly, because they "knew" it was a waste of effort—and made the huge catch of fish, that Peter realized that he was in the presence of someone who was more than human. Peter fell on his knees before Jesus and exclaimed, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

This is the situation we are in when we come before God. But there is a single word which changes all this: *grace*. When Jesus looked at Peter, of course he saw the kind of man Peter was. And Jesus loved him, just as he was. But he also saw what Peter could become.

I've tried to imagine what it would be like to be in the place of Peter or Isaiah. I'm going to now speak as if I were Isaiah.

Not much is known about me before that day. What day? What other day is there?! The day I met God. I could have been a priest, I could have been a thief, he may have been an ordinary person. On that day, it didn't matter. I saw the Lord God, and then I saw myself. I cried out, "Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Let me tell you, no one can meet with God and come away the same as before.

When we stand before God, we may not look like very much. But God looks at us and says, "Beautiful!" God sees beyond the sin and hurt in our lives, and sees the potential that lies within.

That's what happened with me. An angel came over to me with a burning coal. He touched my lips with it. To my amazement, it didn't burn my mouth at all. It *did* burn, though — deep down inside, where there are things hidden that I've never told anyone about. I could feel them burning and then... it was cool and refreshing. They were gone. I never worried about them again.

I was so thankful. Thankful that God accepted me and forgave me. I just wanted to stay there and enjoy being with God forever. Even more, I wanted to show my gratitude to God. Saying “Thanks” may be polite, but it seemed pretty small. I wanted to *do* something for God.

Hey, I know that sounds pretty brazen. Imagine walking up to God and saying, “Nice world you’ve got here. Need a hand running it? I’d be glad to help!” Imagine my surprise, then, when God said, “Yes, as a matter of fact, I do need help.” God’s people needed someone to remind them about God’s commandments, and also of the promise to always be with them to help them. I immediately said, “Hey, I’ll go! Send me!”

Of course I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. You never do when you’re a servant of God. Maybe if I knew then what I know now, I would have found some excuse to hide behind. It’s tough following God when everyone around thinks you’re a crazy fanatic. Yet it’s also been exhilarating, just knowing that I’m actually working with God! Yes, I’ve come a long way... but God’s not finished with me yet! And that’s the really exciting part!

Now, coming back to me, Bruce.

Are you good enough to be one of God’s servants? The experience of Peter and Isaiah make it clear to us that there is only one test you need to pass:

Are you willing?

The ones who think they’re so good are like the boys swaggering into the principal’s office. They treat God like a joke. Probably they’ve never met God in all his power and glory.

The only requirement, again, is “Are you willing?”

Are you willing to follow Jesus Christ? To follow his example of love, service, and humility?

To follow commandments?

Are you willing to put aside your own self-interests, and aim your life so that you follow his priorities?

You don’t have to be good to do this. You don’t have to

be bad either, for that matter. You just have to accept yourself for who you are. Jesus loves you just as you are, so why can’t you?

And accept Jesus for who he is. Your Saviour from sin, and Lord of your life.

Theme for today: Ah, the agony of choosing teams, and being the last one picked. One day I spoke quietly to the two captains before the picking. Imagine the surprise — the pure delight and joy! — of the poorest player to be the first one picked. Then the other captain pointed to the next lowest on the “wanted list.” It went like that until everyone was on a team. That’s glimpse of what things are like in the Kingdom of God: all are worthy, not because of who we are, but because of who God is.