



“Left with Nothing”

BY PASTOR JOHN HILLMER

“I got nothing!” “NOTHING LEFT!” That is what Isaiah and Simon felt in our texts today. Both texts give witness to an experience not common to us who live in the ‘west’. We have so many blessings; with the access & availability of so much in these days of ‘instant gratification’, a click of the mouse, and Amazon delivers tomorrow.

But to be standing in the presence of the ‘Holy’; of the God of the Universe; to be in the presence of the Divine is to be humbled, shaken, humiliated, crushed, to feel mortified. Mortified, overwhelmed by one’s mortality, in the face of eternal divinity. Both Isaiah and Simon were overcome by their experience of “Holy Presence”.

The sense of “Standing in the Presence of the very Divine” leaves one so awestruck that one feels “left with nothing”. Dwarfed; Drained, by the Majesty of the Eternal.

And both texts: the reading from Isaiah and the Gospel reading from Luke, took place within the context of their work, more so, their occupation - their day-to-day livelihood. Isaiah was a priest and a son of a priest. Simon, much like Isaiah was a fisherman and the son of a fisherman. It was in the context of their ‘jobs’ that they caught a vision of God.

To sense that we are left with nothing makes one feel empty. Yet this is the moment that God can give us everything! “Woe is me!” “I am lost!” But the very One who we feel would crush us – is the One who lifts us.

The very One, in whose presence, Simon says *“Go away from me; I’m a sinful man”* and Isaiah says: *“Woe is me. I am lost.”* This very One – says *“get up now go I will send you to the nations.”* This is the One who says: *“I will make you Fish for People You will hold my people – in your heart.”*

So if you feel as if it is all over, God is just getting started with you. These are stories of "call". The "Calling of Isaiah" and The "Calling of Simon".

Story of My Call

I am John – 2nd Son of Sig & Ellen Hillmer. My father was a Lutheran pastor and so was his father. Also on my mother's side – it went back 4 generations. I am the 2nd son of 5 of us kids. We moved around a lot. "PK's" and "Army brats" (love 'em or hate 'em). My father served congregations in: Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Indiana.

I was in grade-school – living in southern Indiana and my dad was serving a 2-point congregation. Churches in Darmstadt; and Elberfeld. On one particular Sunday, I went with my father to the early service, at the smaller of the 2 congregations – in Elberfeld, Indiana. A town of less than 500 people and the church as 6 miles out of town, surrounded by corn-fields. That congregation – Zion Elberfeld – no longer exists. Because Peabody Coal Company bought up miles and miles of land in those parts, and there's nothing left. Strip-mining took all the coal – along with farms and buildings and forests. Well on that particular day, someone didn't 'show' to read the lessons, so dad said: "John – I'd like you to read the Scriptures today." I did and it scared the Dickens out of me - but I did. And I had a sense of "call" and "purpose" that day.

Life goes on. I finished school and we had moved to another part of Indiana – up North West of Fort Wayne – almost to Michigan. After graduating High School I went off to college; to one of the preparatory colleges of the Lutheran Church, to begin studying for the ministry. I was going to be a pastor.

After the 1st year of college – I dropped out. I thought: "Nope. I'm doing this for the wrong reasons. It's not really my decision. I'm doing this, for my father, and to please my Dad (the 2nd child position thinking). So I dropped out and got a job at a "Tool & Die" factory. There are lots of precision machine shops and foundries in northern Indiana – making parts that would get shipped up to Detroit – to the auto industry. I was working the 3rd shift (11pm – 7am) and after 6 months, I made good money for the time, I would be having these 'late night' conversations with God. I knew that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in a factory! It was as if God was saying: *"John – I called you once. You know what you're supposed to be doing – now get back to college and your theological studies!"*

So I went back to college and resumed my studies. I graduated college and went to St. Louis for Seminary. I did my vicarage or Internship in Chicago and was ordained into the Ministry of Word & Sacrament in the Lutheran Church. The rest – as they say – is history.

All of which is to say, part of my journey, is that I had to say "No", before I could really say "Yes" to God's call. And there in the middle of the night, in that tool & die shop, I felt so empty. I was making good money, but it was nothing. **That's when God "came home"!**

The point being. When we're left with nothing and feeling empty, that's the point of readiness. That is when we can begin to receive everything that God has in store for us.

Isaiah was in the Temple doing his thing and was floored by the presence of God.

Simon Peter was doing his fishing thing and was floored by the presence of God. He landed more fish than he'd ever seen and he still felt empty.

And so YOU, in your day to day, every-day life, God is with you! Believe me, he is. And if you feel like you're left with nothing, God is ready to give you everything!

Amen