

# What God wants from me

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Epiphany + 5: Isa 6, Lk 5

The other day, I asked Vicky, "When you have an experience of the divine, do you think it means God wants something from you?" Vicky looked a little bit scandalised. But on reflection, she seemed to concede that there might be something in it. It just needed to be expressed differently. So we tried saying it another way. When we have an experience of the divine, we feel uplifted and transformed. We feel as if we can do extraordinary things. But it's way beyond our experience, and we think God ought to know what we should do next. So then we ask God what we can do. *God's direction – our response – Chicken and Egg?*

Let's look at today's readings. If we think about what we just heard from Isaiah, there's a bit of both – direction and response. Isaiah has a vision of the throne of grace, and sees himself exposed in its light as 'a man of unclean lips'. Peter's reaction is the same in the gospel to the revelation of Christ's power; 'leave me for I am a sinner'. Two people have a vision of God; in their case, their response is to feel self-conscious and embarrassed.

But God's response – Jesus's response – says that's not necessary; it's a response that affirms and enables. We see Isaiah and Peter given their life's calling. Isaiah is called to the life of a prophet; Peter is called to the life of evangelist and apostle. This is a calling which comes both from within them, and from without – it's a meeting of two lines of music that will accomplish wonderful harmony

I suppose in each case you could still say that God did want something from them. But you might prefer to say that God gave them something – something that many people search for all

their lives, but without success. Isaiah and Peter are both given great purpose in life. Their lives are transformed.

That's a spectacular feeling – at once bewildering and exhilarating. A friend of ours was talking about his son who had just finished a science degree in biology, and landed a job on a research vessel studying blue-fin tuna.

As he lugged another stack of fresh tuna steaks home (surplus to the experiment), he asked his parents, 'Is it really work, when you're doing something you love so much? When do they stop the party?'

Neither Isaiah nor Peter ended up having a life you could call a party, but excitement, challenge, purpose, seeing lives transformed, and the world turned upside down – I don't think you'd turn that down for anything.

So did God ask something of them, or give them something? It's a bit of both really. It's something to do with becoming aware of the fact that we share this universe with God, and that we see things differently because of this awareness. You don't judge yourself in the same way. Isaiah and Peter found themselves in the presence of the divine and automatically thought of themselves as unworthy. But that wasn't what God wanted of Isaiah – it wasn't what Jesus wanted of Peter.

Isaiah and Peter only appeared unworthy in their own human eyes. In the divine presence, both of them were given the gift of seeing themselves differently. The Psalmist puts it this way: *...on the day I called, you answered me; you put new strength within my soul.* <sup>138.3</sup>

So that question I asked at the beginning...does God want something from you...I think the answer is yes.

First, God wants you to see yourself differently; positively.

The other thing about these encounters is that God gives the

person a life's work to accomplish. But it's worded in such a way that you can see it differently from being simply a command to be a prophet or apostle or evangelist. It's as though God is looking at you from way outside your life – from its beginning and its end and beyond, yet at the same time, seeing you from within the pit of your stomach – divining your deepest yearnings – and all that at once. So when God asks, 'whom shall I send?', you answer that that's just the sort of person you are.

So in the end, when we have an experience of the divine, it's one of the two or three moments in life when we are being offered ourselves. Our deepest self is rescued from being unhappy or out of place; rescued from doing something that doesn't give life; rescued from seeing what we're doing as being unworthy.

You or I may be given a new way of seeing who we are and what we're doing. Or we may be given a way to move forward – move on to something that we can only do now, because of the new way we can see ourselves right now.

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.

In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Amen