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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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Isaiah 6:1-8  
Luke 5:1-11

## **CONVINCED, NOT COERCED**

Sermon titles are strange and quirky parts of a service that is meant to praise God. Sometimes they're entertaining, sometimes they work, and sometimes they fall flat. Earlier this week I was convinced that I knew exactly what these "call stories" from Isaiah and Luke were telling me. All we need is greater commitment; just deciding again to be more involved. That's what God was saying to me, but not what God wants to say to us today.

God chooses what we would not choose. Peter was a fisherman, probably going bald, probably grey, too old to learn to be a teacher, too busy, and besides, he smells like fish. I can just imagine what Peter's hands must have looked like—rough. But they were smooth compared to his personality. This is a guy who has to live on the very edge of society's polite manners. What I thought these passages were saying is that we need to hear God's call and respond. But they are less about convincing us than they are about helping us understand that God is convinced for us. God chooses and elects us so it's more about us understanding that we don't coerce God into choosing us. We don't convince God that somehow we are worthy or that we would make really good candidates to be disciples. It's about understanding the wonderful mystery that God is convinced long before we even consider responding.

When Peter is the choice that Jesus makes, when his boat is the one that Jesus gets into to teach, he's not thinking what a great teacher. He's thinking about lost wages. After all, he fished all night and has nothing to show for it. He has to go home and explain there must have been a hole in the net. He's thinking about a hot meal and getting some rest so that he can get up that evening and do it all over again. He's thinking he works too hard and puts in too many hours and that his job is filled with expectations and pressure to succeed. He's thinking he might like to try something else. But when the fish are biting, the money's too good.

It could be that like Isaiah, Peter lacks the self confidence. Surely he's curious, but he lacks the self confidence to try for a better life. Isaiah and Peter are speaking to God in simple sentences but what they're saying is the dynamic that we all experience when God tugs at us. The first thing we want to do is go back to our nice safe habits. When God tells us, "This is what I want." We say what they said, "Surely you're mistaken, God. You don't want me to do that. Aren't you the God that's supposed to know what we're thinking? Maybe you haven't been paying attention, but I haven't been thinking such great things lately. Aren't you righteous so what goes through my mind is supposed to be punished or corrected? Why, you should have heard what I thought just the other day, God. Anyway, I'm just one person, just a mortal with unclean lips. God, pick somebody else." Sound familiar?

God doesn't say, "Isaiah, if you're not too busy, I could use some help." God doesn't say, "Simon, if you're interested, would you like to follow me? How about you? Maybe you, you're always a volunteer." No, when Jesus invites them, it's an imperative. When Jesus gives them direction, he expects full cooperation. He expects his instructions to be followed to the letter. God isn't coerced into loving us. God is convinced that we are loving and worthy of God's love because of who God is, not who we are. God is already convinced that you can make a difference. God is already convinced that all you need to do now is trust in God, not yourself.

In 1983, a man named Steve Jobs recognized that his company was too large for him to manage. Sure, he was creative and he was a great programmer, but he needed a seasoned executive to take his company to the next level. He turned to a man named John Sculley, who in 1983 was the senior vice president at Pepsi. Everyone there knew that he was being groomed to take over as the new CEO. Steve Jobs asked John Sculley to join him for a dinner meeting and there he offered him the job of running his company. Sculley came prepared for that meeting and he laid out all of the reasons that he simply could not leave Pepsi at that point in time. Jobs listened patiently but he did not refute any of Sculley's explanations or excuses. He let him finish the whole list and then he leaned across the table and said, "What are you doing with your life? Are you going to spend the rest of your life making colored sugar water or are you going to come and run Apple Computers and change the world?"

Sculley is different than Isaiah and Peter because he had plenty of self confidence. He had plenty of talent, education, and experience. So what made the difference? The difference was that Steve Jobs was already convinced that Sculley was the right person for the job. I'm sure that when Apple was coming of age, there were dozens of executives trying to coerce the founder of Apple to pick them. Jobs already knew that he wanted Sculley.

The founder of this world, the creator of all life, the one who has instituted faith in each of us and for all of us, the one who brings hot coals and purifies us, the one God has confidence and is convinced that you are the one. I think sometimes all that we do at work, on committees, as leaders in the church, as good students of scripture, I think it sometimes gets in the way because we begin to think so much about what we have accomplished or our own abilities. We grow smart. Pascal said early on that knowledge of God without knowledge of our impoverishment only generates arrogance. Any of us acted arrogant lately? The knowledge of our impoverishment, though, without the knowledge of God only generates despair. Any of us said, "I'm doing all that I can do."? But the knowledge of Jesus Christ creates center ground because there we meet God and our impoverishment in one moment. Take this meal today; let it feed your soul where you are impoverished. Let it correct you where you have become arrogant. Let it move you out to say, "Out of all this world, God's chosen me."

Amen.