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"Ears open to obedience you gave me ... then I said, 'Behold, I come.'" (Psalm 40:9, 10).

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isa 49:3, 5-6; Ps 40; 1 Cor 1:1-3; John 1:39-42

Spiritual directors often encourage people to find a passage of scripture that resonates with their life and their desire to find God's will. What if every passage you read stirred your soul with relevance and intimacy? What if you felt called personally to live out what you were hearing and reading at every turn?

What else explains the profile and vocation Jesus chose for himself so intently that he was willing to die to fulfill their prophetic purpose? In a special way, the four Servant Songs of Isaiah and their echo in the Psalms seem to have guided Jesus's self-understanding and mission. From his baptism to his inaugural sermon in Nazareth, his transfiguration to his crucifixion, Jesus seems to be obeying an inner call found in these powerful scripture passages.

The profile that emerges from Isaiah is that of a figure, either collective or individual, who is sent to save God's sinful people by bearing their faults and by suffering rejection and a shameful death to redeem them. He will restore justice to the earth. He will be a light to the nations. He is the Lamb of God who will fulfill the Passover and lead the Exodus from slavery to freedom.

When Jesus is baptized, a dove descends, and a divine voice identifies him as "beloved Son." When he is confronted by Satan in the desert, Jesus rejects temptations to use power and spectacle to save the world, embracing instead the role of Isaiah's suffering servant. When he defines his ministry in Nazareth, Jesus proclaims Isaiah's image of one filled with God's Spirit and anointed to bring good news to the poor, the oppressed, blind and imprisoned. He then boldly says that "this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." At his transfiguration, the baptismal theophany is repeated, this time witnessed by Moses and Elijah. The Law and the Prophets will be fulfilled by Jesus' death in Jerusalem.

This rich pattern of fulfillment drives the letters of St. Paul and the composition of the Gospels, but it also explains the movement within Jesus himself to choose the path he did from the beginning. His reading of the Scriptures was the fire in his imagination and the force within his heart that prompted his activity in first century Palestine and inspired every subsequent interpretation of who he was and what he was doing.

It all began with listening. What is true of Jesus is also true for us. Listening to the scriptures is one source of God's will for us. Words and phrases are highlighted, take root in us, guide our perceptions and decisions because, unlike any other influence, they are a living Word, an encounter with God through the Spirit. To be formed by the Word of God is to dare to claim our place as God's beloved children, and to trust the path being shown to us as disciples of Jesus. With this intimacy, we will never be alone or lacking the insight or courage to take the next step.

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