

**20th June 2004: Rev Pressley Sutherland**  
**Reading: Isaiah 6:8**

In the year the King Uzziah died, I saw God sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of God's robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Sovereign of Hosts; the whole earth is full of God's glory."

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a person of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the Sovereign, the Ruler of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

Then I heard the voice of God saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

## **Here I am. Send Me: Serving with Confidence!**

*(Sermon notes, not delivered as a manuscript)*

As we prepare for Pride we begin to read stories in the Bible and from history through the lens of the particular wisdom that comes from having lived trans-les-bi-gay-queer lives. This season of Pride is not meant to be exclusive, rather it is hoped to be a gift to all people of all genders and sexualities. To have part of the human experience revealed that we think we do not share racially, culturally, sexually, religiously or genderwise is often a great gift if we have the ears to listen beyond the inclination to shoot the messenger for the way the message was delivered.

Some of us experienced this in the two-part Channel 4 broadcast, "God Is Black!" aired the past two Mondays. Whether all of us agree with the way in which conclusions were drawn, I hope that we can see past the way the message was delivered if one disagreed to find the important questions that are being asked of our religious institutions today particularly with regards to races and cultures struggling to be able to have ethical dialogue. I, for one, am still glad that we answered to from Diverse Productions, "Here we are. Send us." We may not always be able to control how our message is received, but if it is truly from God then it will truly bring blessings to others. Because, as one LGBT group put it, "Everyone has the right to Give!" And this is what we will be talking about today, inspired by the call of Isaiah.

Prayer

Story of Isaiah's call/brief

The book of Isaiah is often divided into three distinct sections or voices by scholars, based on historical references and rhetorical analysis, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Isaiah. It was important for prophets to name the prophetic line of which they were the ongoing revelation. Of particular interest to us is the relationship between 1st and 3rd Isaiah. Given the language, the times, the education, and the understandings in 3rd Isaiah's prophecy, it is possible that the author was a eunuch who was taking inspiration from first Isaiah's call---that those who may think of themselves or are thought of by others as unclean, are beyond a shadow of a doubt, touched by God and equipped to do works of love.

What would have happened if 3rd Isaiah had not been inspired by 1st Isaiah to believe that no matter what the Levitical code may have said in the past, God was calling him or her, as he or she was, to continue the prophetic line begun several hundred years before.

Well, we would have never known that God spoke to someone of old and said, "To the eunuchs who keep my commandments, I will give a name better than sons and daughters, a legacy that shall never be cut off"

We would never have known that "my house shall be a house of prayer for all people" and "I will gather others to me as well"

We would never have heard the "Suffering Servant Songs", which Jesus and the early church relied so much upon in order to understand his death and resurrection, and to find strength in their own martyrdom.

We never would have heard, the promise: “?Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come and eat!..For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace, the mountains and the hills shall burst out with songs before you”

Had Isaiah 3 not believed that when God calls God is wise enough to know that we are just the right sort of people to fulfill God’s purpose-our spiritual lives would have been much the poorer.

We must have the courage, as trans-les-bi-gay-queer people to see ourselves as part of salvation history, drawing inspiration from and imagining the lives of those Christians who went before us who may have faced similar life circumstances.

### **Welsh Revivalist: Evan Roberts-**

His nature was one of excellency and sensitivity.

He preferred to travel in the company of women singers and spent much of his life hosted by strong motherly figures, yet there wasn’t even a breath of scandal. He received a revelation of the love of God during a church service where the preacher was crying out to God, “Bend me! Bend me!”

And he seems to have struggled with depression as regular occurrence throughout his life.

While others of his age group became interested in dating, Evan was more likely to be inside the church discussing Scripture with other men.

“I have reached out my hand and touched the flame. I am burning and waiting for a sign.”

Later, while strolling in a garden at night with Sidney Evans, he noticed that Sidney was in a daze, staring at the moon. So, Evan looked up into the sky and inquired, “What are you looking at? What do you see?” Then, suddenly, Evan saw it too. He saw an arm that seemed to be outstretched from the moon, reaching down into Wales.

He had been praying that 100,000 souls would be added to the commonwealth of God in Wales. And in this vision he saw confirmation of Wales being lifted up to heaven. One of Evan’s friends described him during this period as a “particle of radium whose fire in their midst was consuming.”

And yet he was known as the “silent preacher”. He never raised his voice, but he would often be seen moved to tears by the beauty of God and love for the people.

And in these meetings there was often joy, hand-clapping, waves of sorrow, waves of deep quietness that would move through the people-often before even one Bible reading or music had been offered.

They founded the Welsh revival on four points:

Confess all sin. (2)Search out all secret, doubtful things. (3)Confess the Lord Jesus openly. (4)Pledge your word that you will fully obey the Spirit.

Evan adamantly refused any spotlight, saying simply that we are “co-workers” with the Spirit.

### **Dr. Isaac Watts**

Dr. Isaac Watts- became known as the great dissenter philosopher, theologian and father of the English hymn. “physically slight, reticent and constitutionally delicate” attended the Nonconformist Academy at Newington Green in the late 1600s and became tutor to one of Stoke Newington’s wealthy families. It was while he was here that he formed a deep attachment to the young Thomas Gunston, a bachelor in his mid-twenties, whom was referred to by contemporaries as Watt’s intimate friend. Together, they planned the grounds and built the great Manor House on Church Street that would eventually become Abney Park cemetery. It was here, on a little mound of ground that Watt’s would compose poetry and pray. When Gunston died at only thirty-four years of age, Watts seems to have never recovered and spent his life as a single man.

But Isaac Watts had faith in the midst of grieving went on to become one of the greatest preachers and lyricists of the non-conformist movement, but came back to spend his final years at the Manor House that he and Gunston built with Gunston’s younger sister whom they had both helped raise. Watt’s mount remains in Abney Park Cemetery today, a place for reflection and on the edge of great rows of trees and monuments in which many same-sex lovers have secretly met in the following centuries, condemned by both the church to which Watts would not conform, and the church which Watts helped to build, giving words and music described as “soul-stirring fire”, his hymns among the best loved today in reformist and evangelical churches.

And yet, like King David mourning the death of Jonathan, his words remain as a testimony to a lover of God who also loved someone of his own sex dearly in his Pindaric Elegy, originally a private poem only later published:

“Gunston the just, the generous, and the young,  
Gunston the friend, is dead. O empty name  
Of earthly bliss! 'tis all an airy dream,  
All a vain thought! Our soaring fancies rise  
On treacherous wings! And hopes that touch the skies  
Drag but a longer ruin through the downward air,  
And plunge the fallen joy still deeper in despair”

Perhaps you are asking, “Why do we need to ‘queer’ these stories? We need to do so because someone sold me and you a bill of goods that said the church was not built by or for people like us - someone tried to tell us we were not in the history of mainstream Christianity but we have always been used by the Holy Spirit to do her/his work in this world. Your sexuality is not a sin - your gender expression is not a sin - your heart is the site for visions of the hem of God's garment with seraph's flying to touch you with holy awareness, power and love, just as it once did Isaiah.

Don't buy into the strain of thought in some churches that our goal is to become “perfect” people, somehow wallowing in our uncleanness until we become morally perfect in the face of a judging God. The Bible never, ever, ever puts this forward as the paradigm for being called by God, loved by God, and sent forth by God with the Holy Spirit. The Bible shows us a bunch of folks just like us who are simply courageous enough to say, “Here I am God, Send me!”, co-workers with God's Spirit, sent to love and inspire the world for God's sake and for our sake. You can do it, you can be it, if you can see what God has in store for you. Look to God in all things, and God will be in all things.

In an interview in “The Turning”, Dr. Reverend Cheri DiNovo, an advocate and rogue minister in the United Church in Canada who performed many same-sex Holy Unions before they became legal, was saying that love is the measure by which we are judged as parents, standing by our children regardless of their sexuality. The Turning responded:

*The Turning:* But what you've just said could be interpreted as ' you know what, anything goes, just love your kids through it.'

*DiNovo answers:* Well, the thrust of the bible is anti-morality. People are always aghast at that, but that is exactly what it is. Certainly, the thrust of Jesus' ministry is against the morality of his day. He breaks just about every rule, including the commandments. He works on Sunday, and he calls for us all to stand on the side of the marginalized. And to be welcoming to everyone. Now, look at how the church is actually marginalizing people. Look at gays and lesbians, they are so marginalized, we've forced them to start their own church. And women have been marginalized for millennia. That doesn't mean that everything goes - absolutely not. It means you are always working for justice. “.But that's always where we should stand. There's the call of Christ to you, to stand with the wounded. That's what's important. Sexual ethics, every kind of ethics comes from that same place. And keep in mind: we will never, never be perfect. “.We're never going to be there, nobody is. How dare anyone set themselves up as holy over us, to say that you're worse than I am. That's the most unchristian attitude I can possibly imagine. If someone passes themselves off as holy and enlightened, run the other way and hold onto your wallet! They're charlatans for sure.”

When God comes into your life, when Christ touches you, and the Spirit calls you by name, please don't be afraid of God or think God has picked the wrong person - rather, simply say to your great and powerful and loving Creator, “Here I am, as I am. Touch me with your fire. Send me!”