

Can you think of a time you had an Isaiah moment and directly witnessed the power of God operating right before your eyes? How about the last time God used you to express his power to other folks? I'd be willing to bet you can, because the readings suggest that witnessing God's power and allowing God to express it in and through us lies at the root of our mission in this world.

Early on, Jesus described his own mission among us as preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed. That is how God shows us God's power.

As Jesus put that mission into motion, it emerged that his disciples were to play a very important part. I'm going to tell you a story shortly about what that mission looks like, and just how important you and I are. It's a good idea to look at the mission as it's described in the gospel first though, and understand how we figure in it.

Jesus picks seventy-two people to go ahead of him, two by two, to places he intends to visit himself in person later on. The number seventy-two is symbolic, with multiple levels of meaning. At one level it denotes all the nations of the world. At another, it mirrors the seventy-something people Moses chose to assist him, thus inviting us to compare the missions of Moses and Jesus. At yet another level, seventy-two can be taken as an expression that connotes everyone, everywhere, which obviously includes you and me, and thus reveals that you and I are on the same mission as those seventy-two folks in the gospel.

Jesus then explains that their mission is exactly the same as his own. They're to do what they've seen him do and do it in his name. His name and God's power are synonymous, and it will actually be the power of God working through them that will get the job done. So that's what they go off and do, returning later on with some pretty astonishing stories.

Since we're on the same mission as the seventy-two, you might be wondering at this point exactly how you might go about casting out a demon or healing someone these days. Does God really still manifest his power through ordinary folks like you and me? What's the big deal about being sent out as a group, anyway? Let me tell you that story I promised and then you can decide for yourself.

A few years ago I was working the overnight double shift as a volunteer chaplain over at Hartford Hospital. It had been a pretty active night and around 3 AM I was beat. Then a call came from C9WI, the neurotrauma ward. The family of a woman who had suffered a burst aneurysm in her head wanted spiritual support.

Wearily, I told God he was on his own for this one. I remember sensing that God was OK with that and actually had something interesting in mind, but I was too tired to think much about it. When I arrived in the family lounge I found a large, anxious family that was all over the lot emotionally. Some were crying, others were laughing nervously, others were pretty quiet. We prayed together, the way we normally do.

As we finished our prayers, it occurred to me to ask everyone if they'd like to write mom a love letter or a prayer explaining how they felt just then. This way, I told them, when she got better, mom could see what everyone had been thinking and praying while she was out of it. In the moment, I realized this wasn't my idea at all. It was God's. If you haven't noticed in your own life by now, God has a way of making things "occur" to us.

The family liked that idea, so we spent about forty minutes writing. I wondered what I'd be doing with all those prayers and love letters when we got done. It didn't take long to find out.

From somewhere down deep, I found myself urged to ask again if they'd like to go read the prayers and love letters directly to mom. "She's unconscious," they said. "She won't

hear us.” Others said they thought that it might make them feel better, so I checked with the nursing staff first, and then off we went.

Mom was tied up to something to relieve the pressure in her brain. “We want to make that number come down,” a nurse told me, pointing to a gauge, “or this won’t have a happy ending.” I asked everyone to grab or touch mom gently someplace and we’d read the prayers and love letters. They asked me to do the reading, since it was a pretty emotional moment for them.

So that’s what I did. I could tell folks liked doing that all together, but then I noticed something else. Mom was liking it too. The number on the brain pressure meter was going down. One by one we all became aware of that. I have no idea what was going on, but everyone knew Someone Else, Someone very big and very powerful and very gentle was there in the room together with us, and we all got real quiet, except for one man, who simply said “Wow.”

I’m not going to suggest that a miracle occurred, but healing did, certainly among the family. There was liberation from the oppression of despair and helplessness. There was hope among the brokenhearted where there had been none just minutes before. The power of God’s love, working through people and prayer, just the way it had been with the seventy-two, was up to something. We didn’t know what it was, nor did we have to know anything other than that God’s power was being shown to us, just as Isaiah had foretold, right in front of our eyes.

Do you think you’re being called to cast out a demon of some kind or heal someone? Could be – suffering and oppression is everywhere. The next time it “occurs” to you from deep within to do something like that, say a prayer in Jesus’ name and go with it, in faith. You might just find that you’re being sent on a mission.