

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Holy Trinity B  
May 26, 2024  
Isaiah 6:1-8; John 3:1-17

In the Presence of God

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:1-5 ESV)

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Being in the presence of power and might is frightening, especially when you don't know if they are favorably disposed toward you. Remember Dorothy and her friends when they meet the wizard of Oz? They were frightened beyond imagination because they don't know how he will receive them.

Or consider Moses. When he encountered God at the burning bush, he was baffled to put it mildly. Or consider that the people were terrified when Moses would go up Mount Sinai to meet with God. Or, when Moses would meet with God at the tent of meeting it was a truly awesome thing. While we're not told that he was frightened, the people were when he returned to them after meeting with God.

So, have you ever wondered what it would be like to see God, to look on His holiness and see His unbridled glory? Before you answer, listen to what Isaiah said when he had his vision of God in the Temple, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

So you have come into God's presence as He has drawn you here into His house. Do you realize that? Do you realize that each week you come into the very presence of the living God of whom the angels sing, "Holy! Holy! Holy!?" This should incite fear and reverence and awe of the deepest kind. For to lay eyes on God, as Isaiah testifies here, is terrifying beyond imagination. Isaiah sees God and he is consumed by fear. Does that sound odd? Shouldn't

Isaiah have longed to see the God of the universe? Why should the sight of God terrify and alarm Isaiah? Isn't God good?

Well, that is exactly why Isaiah is afraid: because God IS good and holy. But God's goodness is no comfort to Isaiah. For Isaiah is no different than you: a man of unclean lips dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Every lie, every hateful and spiteful word, every piece of gossip that has dripped from your lips has stained them with sin. And the worst place for sinners, as Isaiah found out, is the presence of God. The presence of God is holy and mighty and just and therefore death to the sinner. God's goodness is exactly what terrifies Isaiah: He is scared because the angels sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the the LORD God of Sabaoth." For a sinner to be in the presence of God is like a guilty criminal to be in the presence of judge, jury, and executioner – that the judge, jury, and executioner are good is the criminal's worst nightmare, for good people follow the law and punish criminals. They execute justice.

As it was for Isaiah, so it is with you. For it is the goodness of God that makes Him unapproachable, for Isaiah, and you, and all men are not good, but flawed and sinful. As the Book of Deuteronomy says, "The LORD God is a consuming fire" - a fire which destroys the ungodly. So repent. Like Isaiah, learn humility in the presence of God. Give up your inflated self-esteem and pride. Learn to say, "Woe is me," and mean it. Learn to fear God – for the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

But it's just the beginning. There is more to wisdom than just the fear of God. For behold the mercy of God: Isaiah does not burn up, he is not consumed by the God who is a consuming fire. Instead, when he enters the temple in his vision and sees God, something else is already burning: the fire of incense. Isaiah is not burned up, but instead the incense is burning, and he is cleansed by being touched with a live coal from this incense fire. But what does this mean?

Now this is a vision, a visual parable: and as in all parables, one thing stands for another. In this case, the incense represents Jesus Christ, the one whom Isaiah himself said would be born from the Virgin in order that He might be the suffering servant whose stripes would be our healing, who would bear all our infirmities. Jesus Christ was consumed by God's holy wrath against sin as He hung dying on the cross – just as surely as this coal of incense is seen to be burning as it is held tightly in tongs by the Lord's angel.

And so Isaiah is not consumed; he is not destroyed. Instead, his lips are touched, and he is free: he is united to that burning fire – he is united to Christ and so is forgiven and cleansed.

So count yourselves most blessed, dear Christians, for what Isaiah received only in a vision: you receive here today in reality. For the same Christ that was crucified and consumed for your sins – the same Christ who rose again to bring you everlasting life – this same Christ has come to cleanse you and make you His own. For as Jesus says in the Gospel, "Unless one is

born [again] of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). And you, beloved, are born again of water and the Spirit: for you are baptized in the name of the Triune God. So now the Spirit lives in you and prays with your spirit. And this Spirit continually blesses your hearing of God's Word as you come to this better Temple to hear it proclaimed. And this Spirit leads you to the Son, Whom the Father sent to be lifted up upon the cross, consumed by God's holy wrath, so that you might look on Him in faith and be saved.

And not just look at him: but be touched by Him on the lips just as Isaiah was. Or rather, better than Isaiah was: for again, what Isaiah had in a vision and in signs and pictures, you have here today in reality. For today, the Lord Jesus' most Holy Body and Precious Blood are here to touch your lips and make you clean. For since Jesus has died for sins, once and for all, and got up from the dead, once and for all, now His Body and Blood carry that eternal life and that power of sacrificial-forgiveness. As Jesus said, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:54).

And so, beloved, rejoice that this gift is yours. Rejoice that the whole Holy Trinity is bent on your salvation: the Father so loves you that He sent the Son to die for you, and He has not left you an orphan, but has sent His Spirit to comfort you with His Word and Sacraments.

Thus filled with the Holy Spirit, with cleansed lips, you too confess the faith once delivered to you in your baptism and in which you grow by the work of the Spirit in the Word and in the Sacrament. The steadfast love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit endures forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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