

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 6:1-8

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The 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." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

John 3:1-17

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

“Mysterious Encounter”

When Moses wants to see God, there is that wonderful account of how God tells Moses that no one can see him face to face. When a person comes in contact with God face to face, the holiness of God is so radical, so pure, and so incredible that the person would just fall down dead.

So what God does is place Moses in the cleft of the rock where he is shielded from the direct sight of God. When God has passed by Moses can look upon the back of God. It is only in this passed by state of existence that Moses can come close to the overwhelming holiness of God.

The result of Moses encounter with God in the story is that when Moses comes down from the mountain he is aglow with the glory of God. There is the “sheckina” glory about him that is the result of merely being in the presence of the Holy One. That kind of glory cannot be hidden; it becomes visible even though it was experienced “in passing.”

There are these wonderful Scriptural accounts that describe the nature and presence of God in such vivid and diverse language in such a way that we can all but put our finger on the fullness of who God is and form, at the least, a mental picture of the Creating, Redeeming, Sustaining God. Yet, all of those descriptions are but attempts to describe that which is indescribable. It is an attempt to capture an understanding of the very God for whom even language is not adequate to describe.

Oh, do remember this is the very God who when Moses asked on another occasion—what is your name? This God responded that God’s name is “I am.” “I am who I am.” Or, “I will be who I will be.” There is no

easy remedy for defining this God. “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.”

Then there is this incredible call of Isaiah. Isaiah is very clear about pinpointing when it took place and sharing the details. “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.”

Isaiah has been summoned to the very throne of God. He sees it. He has this vision. He has this dream. He has this experience. It is not fantasy. This is real happening in his life. This is an event. And it is as mysterious as can be. But, it is also real. Mystery does not have to be explained away. It can be as it is—after all, this is the God of “I am who I am.”

Notice that this whole call scene for Isaiah takes place in the context of worship. There is singing and standing before the presence there. There is the Sanctus, yes we sing it at the Lord’s Table: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

In this mysterious encounter what is clear is that Isaiah is struck by the awe/terror of the Lord.

We need to take that in that God has this awesome nature. That God is holy. That God is beyond. That God is so beyond and so incredible that holy is the very description that fits. We get so accustomed to making God into this gentle being—and there is that aspect of God so we don’t want to lose it—but God is also high, lofty, and mighty.

“Almighty and everlasting God,” is the way I will often pray. It begins to capture that holy nature of God. The reality that God can at the same time be intimate with us and the holy Exalted One—that reality is part of the reality that concept of Trinity attempts to grasp in describing God.

So yes, in your life see God as indwelling in you. That is the Holy Spirit. Allow yourself to feel and experience that God that is as near as your next breath and as knowing of you that not even a hair can fall from your head without God knowing it altogether. Also—yes, also embrace and step back and take in the awesome nature of this God who created the heavens and the earth and who reigns over the vastness of the universal all that is and is to be.

That God is the one who we also stand before. The God who sees farther than the Hubble Telescope and who knows more than all of history comprises—that incomprehensible God is the God who longs to be in relationship with us and who, in the words of John’s Gospel, loved us so that he would send the Son, the Only Begotten One.

You and I—along with Isaiah of old are in the presence of that God. That God is before you and behind you and around you. That God shields you and guards you and bids you stand before the holy throne even here and now.

It is before that holy God that Isaiah stands.

So struck with the awesome nature and even the ah-ha terror of God, it goes without saying that Isaiah understands this God to be holy. God is holy and we are not is the shear reality of Isaiah’s experience here.

That reality causes Isaiah to look at his own life. And when he looks at his own life he realizes that he is unworthy of standing before the throne of the Lord and so are his people. There is that point in which he becomes conscious of his unworthiness, and there is also that point where he becomes conscious then too of the fact that even though he is unworthy he is none the less in the presence of the Lord.

He is unworthy. But he is still there. He is unworthy. But he has been called to such a time and such a place as this. That is a consciousness of grace. It is a grace moment.

We are to have such grace moments. We are to have these moments too when we realize that we do not deserve to be in the amazing presence of God—that we do not deserve to be the object of God’s desire and the object of God’s call, yet that is what we are. And when we realize it that God has so called us here and selected us to be before God—that is a grace moment when we realize it.

The unworthiness in us is accorded the merits of being before the Lord—that is grace. God’s grace is about bestowing that love on us not because we deserve it but because God so chooses to love us still and in spite of everything else. Grace.

Standing before the Lord, there is Isaiah in that sheer holiness of God. He comes the recognition that he is unworthy to be there. Yet God has placed him there. Then the call to serve comes. To grasp and conceive of the holiness of God is also to grasp and conceive of the radical call of God on our lives to live and be and do.

God calls Isaiah.

Isaiah knows he is not worthy to serve. But, what other option is there when he is standing here? There is no other option.

God calls. You respond. This is not an accept or reject situation. It is not about the question of whether Isaiah, and then the question about us—it is not a question about will we/will he accept or reject. It is about giving in to and facing the presence of the Lord. In that presence—there is the Holy One and that Holiness is so holy that it calls us in to our authentic reality of who we were designed and destined to be—that is not an option thing. It is more of a coming home.

It is more of a coming out or coming into who we are called to be.

You see for Isaiah, and for us too—this is not the time to say “no” it is the time to say “woe.”

When Isaiah has this mysterious encounter – it is not about yes or no—it is about woe! It throws off his equilibrium. He can no longer live in the patterns or existence of before this moment. And it is changing. It is classic worship here. Isaiah comes into the presence of God, and there in that presence he is able to say “woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

It is here that his lips are touched with the burning coal by the seraph. What is happening here is Isaiah confesses his sin, he is cleansed of his sin, and he receives a clean heart. It is only then that he can hear God’s call with clarity.

Isaiah is changed. The radical holiness of God changes Isaiah.

It was what Jesus was trying to tell Nicodemus, and Nicodemus had such a hard time grasping what Jesus was trying to say. This is what Jesus was saying when he told Nicodemus that he had to be “born from above.”

To be born from above is to be changed. To be born from above is to allow the mystery of the ages to enter your life in such a way that it is transforming. It changes your perspective. It alters the way in which you not only see the world, but the way in which you see yourself.

This holy God calls you into relationship—This Jesus the Christ meets you in your flesh—This Holy Spirit takes the very breath of God and breaths it into your lungs and heart and mind and spirit—and that holiness is radical.

There is no way to know God without being changed. If you cannot figure out why things are not changing for you—oh, it is not about you. It is about coming into the presence. It is about getting above—being born from above—where our know is connected to the God of the ages. And when we come to that we are changed, transformed, and transported to a new reality—one that is above and mysterious and oh more real than any reality that we have ever known.

Amen.