

Trinity Sunday – May 31, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Isaiah 6:1-6 NIV

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2) Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3) **And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."** 4) At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5) "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." 6) Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7) With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 8) Then 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!"

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus:

Frequently in the Old Testament times the Lord was willing to reveal his glory to those whom he called into his service. We might think of the account of Moses and the Burning Bush where the Lord called Moses to rescue his people from their slavery in Egypt and revealed himself as the "I Am God" when he told Moses, "Tell them 'I Am' has sent you." The splendor of the Lord's glory was also on display as he called and commissioned the Prophet Isaiah to speak to his people for him.

This Scripture like all of Scripture reveals the glory of our Lord. It does this by giving us glimpse into throne room of God in heaven and showing us some incredibly amazing things – things which stir our imaginations. I have to confess I've long liked the pictures in Isaiah shares with us from his vision. But at times those pictures have overshadowed the simple fact that the Lord was empowering and calling Isaiah to be his servant. And almost lost in this account is the historical setting of this vision. Isaiah links this vision to an historical event – the death of King Uzziah – to establish that both the vision and the death of Uzziah were real occurrences. Sandwiched in between those facts is the amazing description of what was going on in the Lord's throne room including a wonderful description of the seraphs (a type of angel) as they glorified the Lord.

Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. These angelic beings were hovering over the Lord ready to do his bidding. In a demonstration of their honor and devotion to the Lord these fiery creatures (that's what the Hebrew word seraph means) used two of their wings to shield their faces from the brightness of the Lord's glory. In a posture of humility they used two of their wings to cover their feet. They used the other two wings to enable them to hover and fly. **And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."**

The Lord Almighty, they declare to each other is three times holy. The Gospel writer John tells us that Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord Jesus and spoke about him. (cf. John 12:41) John no doubt had this vision in mind when he spoke those words. The Lord Jesus is holy – set apart and separate from all he created with the Father and the Spirit. He is holy – without sin. Personally I've often wondered if the threefold repetition of the word holy is a veiled reference to the Trinity. I wonder if they angels don't pause before the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as they proclaim their three-fold, "Holy, Holy, Holy." While this threefold repetition may be a veiled reference to the Trinity; there is no way to force that meaning on this text but I'm sure that is why it was selected as lesson for Trinity Sunday. When the Lord asks, "Who will go for us?" we must indeed note that the three persons of the Trinity are implied with the word, "us".

As this song of the angels resonates back and forth in the heavenly throne room the room begins to tremble as we will sing later in our service: The beams and lintels trembled at the cry, And clouds of smoke enwrapped the throne on high. Or as the NIV says: **At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.** You and I might simply say that their voices raised the roof or shook the rafters.

Almost lost in everything that we have been talking about is the amazing fact the Lord of glory – the Holy Almighty One has singled out Isaiah to enlist him in his service – cleansing him from his sin and equipping him for his service. But it is this fact which allows us to take this text to heart as we contrast who the Lord is and what he has done for us with who and what we are.

Theme: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty but 1. We are people of unclean lips. Thankfully 2. Our guilt is taken away and our sins atoned for and now 3. The Lord calls for us to go for him.

Isaiah was permitted to experience the glory of the Lord God in heaven with all of his senses. Just the praises of the seraphs were enough to send massive tremors through the entrances to the foundations of heaven itself. Isaiah could see the glory of God, hear it, feel it and perhaps even taste and smell the smoke. It's no wonder that he cried out, **"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."**

The Lord God is holy – completely perfect and separate from sin. In (Isaiah 59:2 NIV) the prophet would remind the people of his nation **your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.** Isaiah understood that his sins, like ours, separate us from God and place us under his wrath and condemnation. It could only be by an act of mercy on God's part that Isaiah would be able to see the Lord and live.

Isaiah had heard the song of praise from the lips of the seraphs. In contrast the lips of man often are unclean. The apostle James speaks of the corruptive nature of our tongues: (James 3:2 NIV) **We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check 5) ... the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6) The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire ... 8) no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9) With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.**

We like to sing our own praises rather than the praises of God and others. We use our lips in so many unclean (sinful) ways: spreading hurtful rumors, saying unkind things, putting others down to make ourselves look good, perhaps even using them to curse and swear against the Lord. And those are just the ways we use our lips – sins of commission if you will. But what about the ways we fail to use our lips – the sins of omission? How often haven't we left unsaid a kind word, a comforting word, a word of praise? How often haven't we failed to call out to the Lord to praise his holy name? How often haven't we watched silently as someone made a shipwreck of their faith by abandoning the ways of the Lord? How often haven't we failed to confront sin with the Law and comfort the grieving sinner with the Good News of forgiveness for Jesus' sake?

Like Isaiah we must confess – Woe is me. I deserve nothing from the Lord. I have nothing to say before him that will merit his pleasure – nothing to offer that can cause him to set aside his righteous wrath against my sin. I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.

Now you and I would describe Isaiah as a good person – someone like us – he had his weaknesses but non-the-less he was a hard working, religious person. Yet he understood that he could not stand in the presence of the Lord because of his sins.

And you and I understand that too – almost as soon as we enter into the Lord’s house to worship him we acknowledge our sins, imploring the Lord’s forgiveness. Isaiah’s confession was met with an act of grace which assured him that his guilt was taken away and his sin atoned for. **Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7) With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."**

What a wonderful example of the Lord’s grace. Just as the Lord immediately came to the aid of Adam and Eve following their fall into sin so the Lord immediately comes to the aid of Isaiah – dispatching one of his angels to bring his forgiveness to Isaiah. These verses remind us of the purifying nature of fire even as they picture for us the wonderful grace of God which takes away guilt and atones for sin.

Guilt refers in a general way to our natural inclination to sin. It was guilt which led the Psalmist David to decree: (Psalms 51:5 NIV) **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.** As we all know this inclination to sin – this sinful nature which we all have often shows itself by the sinful words we speak and the sinful deeds we do. It also shows itself by the words we don’t speak and the things we don’t do that we ought. But in his grace the Lord has completely removed our guilt and he continues to wash away our sins. Our guilt is taken away and our sins atoned for because of the wonderful grace of God which sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the world.

Isaiah was comforted by the purifying nature of the coal which touched his lips. We are comforted by the moist touch of the water joined with the word in baptism which forgives our sins. Baptism changes us into people who have been washed and cleansed by the purifying blood of Christ and set apart as a people who are justified in God’s sight. Isaiah also was changed by the Lord’s forgiving and cleansing grace.

Isaiah continues his account by writing: **Then 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!"** With these words the Lord directly called Isaiah to be his spokesman. Notice the change that has taken place in Isaiah following the Lord’s cleansing touch. Previously he had lamented – woe is me. Now he expresses his confidence in the Lord by gladly saying, send me in spite of the fact that he has no idea where and what the Lord wants him to go and say. The Lord’s grace and forgiveness has given him a willingness to do the Lord’s bidding and the confidence to rely on the Lord for the strength and the ability to follow wherever the Lord will lead him.

And that’s just like the change that comes over us when we experience the love and forgiveness of our Lord in baptism, through the reading of the Gospel message or through the Lord’s Supper. Titus 2:11-14 reminds us of this change. **For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12) It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13) while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (NIV)**

Our guilt is taken away and our sins atoned for and now The Lord calls for us to go for him. Isaiah displayed his eagerness to do that by saying, “Here I am Lord, send me.” By God’s grace you and I also are able to show our eagerness to respond to the Lord’s call by gladly hearing and doing what his Word says. With his help and aid we will set aside our hateful, hurtful words and replace them with kind, gentle and forgiving words. With his help and aid we will use our lips to sing his praise and to declare his saving grace to others.

In response to our prayer, “Lord open my lips and I will declare your praises,” may we rejoice to say with the seraphim gathered around the throne: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty. Amen.