

ISAIAH'S VISION OF GOD'S GLORY, HIS CONFESSION, AND CALLING

A sermon for May 27, 2018, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba
Holy Trinity Sunday

Gospel: **Isaiah 6:1-6** *The Call of Isaiah*

'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. Seraphs 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. And one called to another and said:

*'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his 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 man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord 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 the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

This is Holy Trinity Sunday. Our Church is named after the Holy Trinity. But I am not here to teach about the Holy Trinity. I open with the words of the prophet Isaiah (40:18-19; 21-23). The prophet wonders about our knowledge of God, writing:

*¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness shall we compare Him with him?*

*¹⁹ An idol? —A workman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,
and casts for it silver chains.*

*²¹ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*

*²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;*

*²³ who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.*

Our God is the God who controls time and space. He is Israel's true and authentic king. The Israelites were determined to ask God to give them a human king and God gave them one. But God controlled and still controls human affairs. He puts human kings and rulers into office and removes them from office when he chooses.

Human kings live and die. For example, King Uzziah ruled Israel in approximately 740 B.C. He had brought prosperity to his people. The only mistake he made was to hunger for more power, beyond the power of kingship. He tried to take over the office of High Priest and to assume the duties of others whom God had divinely assigned (namely the sons of Aaron). God disposed of him and removed his power -- God struck Uzziah with leprosy and he died.

To whom can we liken God?

Isaiah had a vision of the majesty of God, the Almighty Lord, during the reign of King Uzziah. It was a lofty vision. Isaiah was not day-dreaming. He was not having a nightmare. It was a real vision. It displayed God's greatness, His majesty, His power and His might. It also displayed Him as a mystery. It is this vision that convinced the prophet Isaiah of his sinfulness. The Almighty God did not convince Isaiah of his sin, Isaiah saw for himself after his encounter with God's glory. When we encounter the majesty of God in our lives we are also convinced of our sinfulness.

Let's look closely at the things Isaiah saw in this vision.

First, he saw the Lord God, ***who was, who is and who will always be***; He saw the ever-living majesty of God. The majesty of God he saw was not subject to dying and could not be removed from office. God is the **everlasting God!** He is the ***Great I am: He was, He is, and He will always be.***

Psalm 90:2, says, "***Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to the end, you are God.***" Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses and therefore, the first Psalm written.

Second, Isaiah saw God's majesty **highly praised, highly honored, and highly glorified**. God was highly lifted up. Surely, God is highly lifted -- there is nothing above God. God is far greater than any human being can imagine. He answers to no one! He is accountable to no one but himself. He deserves all **praise and honor and glory**.

Third, it was revealed that only **angelic beings**, the *Cherubim and Seraphim*, are responsible to attend God's throne. They are the heavenly hosts who are continually praising God, crying out one to another, "***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.***"

Fourth, in the very fact that we are facing the holiness of God (the way Isaiah did), our shortcomings are exposed. God is morally pure. Those who serve him must be sanctified or set apart from sin. Isaiah realized the **abundance of sin that filled his heart and that his mouth spoke from this state of impurity**. By saying, **I am a man of unclean lips**, Isaiah was confessing the sin that filled his **unclean heart**. After seeing God's majesty, he felt totally unworthy.

The Roman centurion who said to Jesus, *"Sir, I am not worthy that you enter my house, but say one word and my servant will be healed,"* felt the separation of sin.

That's why we begin our worship with a *"Brief Order of Confession and Forgiveness."* We confess so that *"our iniquity is taken away and our sin is purged."* We must always take time to confess our sins fully because that confession draws us closer to the holy One. I can tell you openly that when I am at the altar (the holy of holies in this sanctuary), I see my own imperfections. I believe you feel the same when you come to the altar for Communion and kneel in reverence to God.

Fifth, the name **Seraph** derives its meaning from **burning**. Thus, it implies a purifying, or sanctifying fire. The ministry of the Seraphim is to sanctify or purify humans who might be used by God in service to him. With Isaiah, God dispatched a Seraphim from His throne. The angel brought a live coal from the altar before God's throne to touch the lips of Isaiah and cleanse him. Base materials are removed from gold and silver by fire. Similarly, God declared to Isaiah, *"Thy iniquity is taken away, thy sin is purged."*

If we are going to become God's messengers, we need to be sanctified, purified, cleaned of sin. We are all infected with moral and spiritual pollution which must be cleansed away. The first thing God does for us is remove that which would hold us in captivity, away from Him. Just as God did to Isaiah, so God does to every sinner who confesses their sin. God removes that sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness every time we confess.

We may not see the vision of the majesty of God like Isaiah did, but we have some knowledge of God's glory. Isaiah suggests that God's majesty is visible in God's creation, in nature. In Isaiah 40:26, the prophet writes:

*"Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing."*

Isaiah saw a vision that revealed the living God -- a God who is in control, who is praised, who is holy. We are not Moses or Isaiah who were blessed to see God's glory and mercy passing before them. But, we have the opportunity to behold God's majesty in His creation. The hymn *"How Great Thou Art!"* (O store Gud) helps us to do just that. Verse 1 says:

*O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made.
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art; How great Thou Art.*

And if that is not enough, another song (written by Thomas Chisholm, who spent time with God in his creation) wonders how all things work together. The Hymn titled, "*Great Is Thy Faithfulness.*" I have chosen the second stanza which says:

*Summer and winter, and Springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness.
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love
Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All that I needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me!*

Yes, we are finite human beings and morally imperfect. We cannot see God face to face and live. But we have been blessed to see God's marvelous works. We know Him by what He does and by what he has done.

God's glory, His character, His nature, and power relates to us in His visible creation. God gives us a vision of His love and mercy through all the benefits he provides. Any man who is too proud to see God's glory in nature will never fully know who God is.

God is merciful and forgiving. He dispatched a Seraph from His throne to touch the lips of Isaiah and cleanse him from his iniquity. God removes that which would separate us from Him. Just as God drew Isaiah to Himself, God draws us every time we confess our sin. God has a purpose and a plan for every confessing person sitting here today. God will sanctify you and cleanse you so that you might be enabled to serve Him. But . . .

- God will never force anyone to become His human instrument.
- God does not compel anyone to serve Him.
- God gives us all the freedom to decide for ourselves to serve Him.

God simply asks, '*Whom shall I send, who will go for us*' and leaves the response to be freely ours. We have the liberty and freedom to accept the call from God or to refuse the call. Isaiah accepted the call, saying, '*Here am I, send me Lord.*' *Send me now! Send me!*

Will you be His feet! His ears! His Mouth, in this sinful world among sinful people?

If only you are convinced from within, then you must answer like Isaiah, 'Here am I, send me Lord.' Amen.

Amen!