

First Sunday after Pentecost; Holy Trinity; May 26, 2024

Isaiah 6:1-8

The Trinity Cleanses and Calls

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they flew. Once called to another and said,

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies!

The whole earth is full of his glory!

The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the temple was filled with smoke.

Then I said, "I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!"

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with the coal and said, "Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."

Then I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!"

"In the year King Uzziah died..." Do you know who King Uzziah is? Do you know how and why he died? Some think Isaiah mentions the year of his death only as a chronological marker. In a world without a uniform dating system, the beginnings and ends of reigns were often used to place a story on history's timeline. But I think it's more than that.

Uzziah was one of Judah's rare good kings. He followed a long line of idolatrous goons, but Uzziah was a good one. He tore down altars and temples built for false gods. He pulled the people of Judah away from the gods of the surrounding nations and back to the Lord God of Israel. Uzziah restored and remodeled the temple of the Lord. He fought bravely to expand Judah's borders and brought the nation into a silver age of political, economic, and spiritual recovery.

And then Uzziah got proud. He was a good king, but that wasn't good enough for him. He decided that he was so good he should go into the temple and sacrifice to the Lord. But that was not the work of the king. The Lord had priests, Levites, to make the sacrifices in the temple, and no one else was allowed to do it. Not even a king. Not even an excellent king, like Uzziah.

So he died. He died for thinking he was bigger and better than he was. He died because he went into the temple thinking, "I'm good enough to be here in the Lord's temple, in the presence of holiness." And he wasn't.

In that same year that good King Uzziah died for entering the Lord's presence without permission [Isaiah] saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above

him stood six seraphim. Each had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they flew. One called to another and said,

Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Armies!

The whole earth is full of his glory!

The foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of the one who called, and the temple was filled with smoke.

Now Isaiah, in a vision, finds himself in the temple, where the holy God dwells. And everything Isaiah sees and hears tells him: The Lord is holy. He's on a throne, exalted. His royal robe fills the whole temple. Angels, who are holy, fly with their faces and feet covered because even they can't bear the sight, or stand in, God's glory. And they cry out words of praise: Holy, holy, holy! When the Lord speaks, the earth shakes and smoke fills the temple.

And there is only one thing for Isaiah to think: I'm about to go the way of King Uzziah. I didn't proudly walk into the temple to make a sacrifice like him; this is a vision, and I didn't even ask to have this vision! But here I am, in the presence of the Lord's holiness. I am a dead man like Uzziah, a sinful man in the presence of a holy God. **Then I said, "I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!"**

So now it's time to get you into this story. It's about Uzziah standing and falling in the presence of a holy God. It's about Isaiah thinking the same will happen to him. And here's where you come in: **Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!** You are not standing in the temple of Jerusalem like Uzziah. You are not even seeing it in a vision like Isaiah. But wherever you are in this world, you are in the presence of a triple-holy Lord. You stand every moment of your life before the holy Father, the holy Son, and the holy, Holy Spirit. And you stand before them as an unclean person, filthy with sin. And what happens to any unclean person in the presence of a triple-holy Lord? **"I am doomed."** Isaiah knew it. He felt his uncleanness and doomed state in the presence of the Lord. Maybe you feel it, too, in your own life. Or maybe, like King Uzziah, you delude yourself into thinking you're good enough to stand in front of triple-holiness even though you're unclean. But do you know what? They were both doomed, whether they felt it or not. And so are you, whether you know it or not.

It's because the Lord is calling Isaiah to preach – to work as a prophet – that Isaiah thinks first of his unclean lips, and his sinful eyes that cannot glimpse the glory of holiness and survive. Our lips are unclean, too, but so is every part of us. And we, like Isaiah, are doomed.

And make no mistake: Isaiah is doomed. When he makes that statement about his unclean lips and the damnation coming his way, the Lord's response is not to say, "Oh, no, Isaiah. Come on, don't be so hard on yourself. You're okay. You can stand in the glory of a holy God!" God has a different response. It is to purify Isaiah so that he can stand in God's glory and go to work in God's service.

God sends an angel with a glowing coal from the altar. The angel touches Isaiah's lips with this glowing coal from the altar and purifies his lips. **He touched my mouth with the coal and said, "Look, this has touched our lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."** God has worked to purify us, too. God the Father planned our purification from eternity and sent his Son to be sacrificed. The holy life of our Savior, the blood he shed to pay for our sins on the cross, is our burning coal. Jesus touches and brands

every believer with his holiness while he burns their sin away. In him, your guilt is taken away and your sin is forgiven.

Isaiah's purifying coal comes from an altar, a place of sacrifice. So does yours. Jesus is the divine sacrifice that purifies, and his sacrifice is eternal. The coal never cools. It touches you today, always. Jesus has touched you and still does. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.

An angel brought this coal to Isaiah's lips. Who is your angel that brings you Jesus' righteousness? He is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings you Jesus in Word, water, and Supper and touches you with him, to take away guilt and forgive sin. The Holy Spirit works through messengers, angels so to speak, to bring you the coal of Christ. He sends pastors and teachers to carry that coal to you. He sends parents to carry it to their children, friends to carry it to friends. It's always the Spirit, working through Word and sacrament to bring us Christ. But he uses messengers – that's what "angel" means – to deliver it.

So even in the Old Testament, where the Trinity is gradually revealed in subtle ways, we see the work of the Triune God. The Father sees the doomed state of sinners and responds to save. The Son provides the sacrifice at the altar and becomes the purifying coal that burns for eternity. The Spirit comes with Christ – using his messengers to deliver.

And so Isaiah stands in the presence of the holy Lord. He is not doomed; now he stands. And so do you and I. We stand in God's grace now, and we will stand in his glory, seeing all his holiness face to face. And we will stand there with him forever.

But the Lord's word of forgiveness is not his final word to Isaiah. He has a question, too: **"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"** (Here, by the way, we see another subtle reference to the three-in-one nature of God: he is both singular and plural. There are others in these verses besides: he is three times holy, and he is named LORD, "Yahweh," a singular noun with a plural form.) He has a question for purified, forgiven Isaiah: Will you go for me? Will you use your now guilt-free lips to speak for me? Will you use the feet of your forgiven self to go for me to these people and call them to me?

The Triune God has a question for you today, too. Will you go for him into the callings he has given you? Will you go home today and show kindness to your brother or sister? Will you go home and love your wife as Christ loves his Church? Will you go to work tomorrow and work with all your heart, as for the Lord? Will you go and obey laws, whether or not you like them, and respect your leaders, whether or not you like them? Will you go and speak for him? Not as a prophet of from a pulpit, but among whomever he places you? Will you be a messenger who carries the burning coal of Christ to purify a friend or a child or neighbor?

Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!" What other answer could Isaiah give? Doomed sinner, standing in the glory the three-times over holy Lord. What other answer could he give, after God moved to heal him? What other answer could there be, after he was touched with that coal from the altar, brought by the angel? What other answer could we give, doomed sinners in the glory of the Triune God? What other answer could we give, after the Father moved to heal us, his Son made the sacrifice, and his Spirit brought us the coal from the altar? What else can we say, purified and forgiven? **"Here I am. Send me!"** Amen.