

First Sunday After Pentecost - Holy Trinity Sunday

June 7, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran - Pastor Chip Wilke

Isaiah 6:1-8

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. 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. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "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." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 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!" (NIV)

Holy, holy, holy. What comes to mind when you hear the word “*holy*”? What do you think about when you consider coming to worship a Holy God? I fear that holiness has been taking a beating. There’s holy everything – holy cow, holy smokes, “*Holy double-cross, Batman!*” There is even a city in Ohio that somehow became “*Holy Toledo!*” At times the word holy is even put in front of words that shouldn’t be spoken. Has reverence for God diminished because, as the saying goes, “*Nothing’s holy any more*”?

This morning, on this Holy Trinity Sunday, we are reminded where the word holy truly belongs. There is One who is three times holy. There is One who is to be called holy for holiness is to be without sin. There is an Almighty God that is to be revered as holy for He hates sin and is set apart from all that is not holy. If we have started to drift away from what it means to worship a Holy God, we will quickly return to reverence for the Lord as we walk with Isaiah into the throne room of the Almighty. My prayer this morning is that through His Word the Lord leads us to see with Isaiah and sing with the angels: **Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty.**

God’s holiness would be seen in how the Lord was about to deal with His people Israel. Judah had enjoyed great prosperity and power under King Uzziah. The kingdom to the north also enjoyed outward success under Jeroboam II. The borders of Israel were extended back almost completely to what they had under David and Solomon. But all that was about to change. Picture two great boulders set in motion. One was headed for Israel and one for Judah. God’s punishment for Israel’s unbelief and sin was coming in the form of Assyria and Babylon. The death of King Uzziah marked the beginning of the end for these kingdoms. In about twenty years the northern kingdom will fall. Still, the Lord in His mercy sent prophets to warn the people that the boulders of His wrath were on the way. He sent prophets to call the people to repentance. Today, we have before us the call of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah describes this awesome event: ***“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. 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. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”*** Try to imagine this sight. The Lord on His throne high and exalted. The King of kings and Lord of lords filling the temple. This Almighty Lord surrounded by high ranking angels who themselves showed great reverence and humility in His presence. These seraphs which means “fiery ones,” these holy ones ready to do His bidding, even stood in awe of the Almighty. With two wings they covered their faces and with two they covered their feet as they were flying in the presence of the three times holy Lord whose glory fills the earth. At the sound of the angels song the whole place shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

How would you react? What would you say? How would this make you feel? God has not taken us in such a vivid way directly into His presence, but we too come before the Almighty. We do so together every week in this house as we worship the Lord. We come into this place filled with His presence. I know in some churches most everyone dresses in their very best each week and I’ve been in churches with kneeling posts and I even served in a church where we invited the people to get on their knees as they confessed their sins. Please understand I’m not saying we should implement a dress code or order kneeling posts today. I know that customs are different and different ways of doing things are okay. Yet, there is one thing I pray that still remains - that we are filled with humility, reverence, and awe as we worship a Holy God. We are in the presence of Him who is holy, holy, holy. We come before the Creator and Maker of all things whose glory fills the earth. We come to worship before the throne of the Lord Almighty who is set apart from sinners.

That’s why Isaiah’s reaction is not at all surprising. . ***“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.”*** Isaiah had no excuses, nothing at all he could offer the Almighty. He had no way out and no escape as He stood in the presence of the Holy Lord who hates sin. Isaiah saw he was ruined. He was unclean. He was anything but holy. So Isaiah’s reaction to standing before the Holy One is ***“woe to me.”***

And how can our reaction be anything different? What do you have to offer the Lord Almighty? He doesn’t take credit cards or even need money. A lifetime of good works fall far short of His glory. Unless we are completely without sin and totally holy there is nothing we have to offer God. Standing next to the holiness of the Almighty makes it clear who we are - sinners. God hears our lips speak lies and sees our hearts filled with lust. He knows our every unclean thought and word and deed. He knows all the things that make you and I unholy. He knows the world is filled with unclean people, with sinners who would burn like straw in a furnace in His Holy presence. As we stand before the Lord, like Isaiah, we must confess ***“Woe to me!.. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.”*** That’s the only proper response when sinners lay their eyes on the King, the Lord Almighty!

Yet, did you notice how the Holy One approaches Isaiah from His throne of grace? What a beautiful, wonderful picture comes next! The sweet, sure, pure gospel comes to this man who was ruined. ***“Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*** From the altar, from the place of sacrifice, a live coal was taken by one of the seraphs with tongs and with it the angel touched Isaiah’s lips. And then Isaiah heard the good news. Literally, the Hebrew reads *“and has been removed your guilt, and your sin is being thoroughly covered.”* The Holy One completely removes Isaiah’s sin and guilt and He makes Isaiah holy. Who would do such a thing? Who is this Lord Almighty? We know for sure that right there was the second person of the Trinity. How do we know? John tells us exactly who Isaiah saw when he writes: ***“Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him”*** (John 12).

Our Truine God - Father, Son, & Holy Spirit has done the same thing for us. The Lord Almighty planned and carried out our salvation. The Lord Almighty carried it out through the work of Jesus. Our guilt has been removed because Jesus took it all upon Himself. Our sin has been thoroughly covered because Jesus poured out His lifeblood on a cross to wash us clean. Our sin and guilt has all been paid for by Jesus. Forgiveness flows from that place of sacrifice on Calvary’s hill where the Holy One laid down His life for sinners. His empty tomb proclaims the truth that God declares us to be holy in His sight for Jesus’ sake. In His grace the Almighty has sent His messengers to touch us with water and the Word to make us clean. He sends His messengers to touch our lips with His own body and blood for our forgiveness. He sends messengers to warn of the coming boulder of His judgment on the Last day and to proclaim to us the sweet gospel message.

Think about just how wonderful this news is and how we now react to this? Examine your own life and see how much you lack the holiness you need to live with the Lord. Standing next to the Holy Almighty Lord what do we look like? Like Isaiah we are dirty, dirty, dirty and sinful, sinful, sinful people. That was until the Lord came to us from His throne of grace. While we were still sinners Christ died for us! Now we are clean, clean, clean and forgiven, forgiven, forgiven people. In fact, now there is another place where the word holy truly belongs because wearing our Savior’s robes of righteousness we are holy, holy, holy saints of God. For the Lord Almighty has declared: ***“See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”***

How else could we possible react to this awesome news than in the way Isaiah did? What other answer could we give to our Lord Almighty who in Jesus has freely forgiven us who had nothing to offer? After tasting His grace what else could now be more important than this? How else could we respond to hearing the voice of the Lord saying: ***“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”*** than to respond gladly, quickly saying: ***“Here am I. Send me!”*** Indeed, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory! Amen.