

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ The pivots[a] on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ 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!"

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph[b] touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed, and your sin is blotted out." 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!" ⁹ And he said, "Go and say to this people:

'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.'

¹⁰ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."

One time a friend drove her neighbor to see some people who lived about fifty miles away. The ladies enjoyed a nice visit, but when it was time to leave, they discovered that the keys were locked in the car. Neither of them knew what to do, so the car owner had to call her husband, who had a spare key. Understandably, he was quite annoyed.

A few minutes later, the neighbor decided to try to open the back doors of the car. Sure enough, one was unlocked. The car owner rushed back into the house to call her husband, hoping to reach him before he left, but it was too late.

"Wait till he sees this!" the neighbor said, "He'll be more than upset. What are you going to do?"

"What any red-blooded American wife would do, she replied, grinning. Then she walked out to the car, opened the back door, pushed down the lock button, and slammed the door shut!

Obviously, the car owner was feeling nervous as she anticipated her husband's reaction if he found out that she made him drive fifty miles to help her for nothing. She was afraid he would be angry. She probably felt embarrassed that she neglected to check whether any of the car doors were unlocked. And so she concluded that it was easier to hide behind a lie than to tell the truth and face his reaction.

In today's scripture we find the greatest prophet ever, Isaiah, recalling a powerful and vivid vision he had—a vision of being in the presence of God. As we try to picture his vision in

our mind's eye, we can imagine what it must have felt like to stand alone in God's glorious presence—perhaps fearful, vulnerable, and insignificant. His vision also tells us something about the nature of God.

Isaiah tells us that he sees the Lord sitting high and exalted on a throne, and his robe filled the temple. Isn't it just like God to fill a room! And really, if we consider other readings from the Bible, we know that God cannot be contained in a room. God is everywhere! For example, we read in Psalm 139:7-12, "*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*" God is everywhere!

Isaiah also said he saw seraphs with six wings, covering their face and feet. Seraphs are members of the highest order of angels. What a sight that must have been! They were not there to rescue God, or protect God, or to convey some special message to God, which is the role we often times think of angels fulfilling. No, they were there to worship God.

They covered their faces because God was too great for them to look upon. They covered their feet because God was too extraordinary to be in the presence of. Isaiah knew he was in the presence of One who is pretty special, awesome, breathtaking, humbling, fearsome. There is no word great enough to describe God's presence. The best the angels could do was to call God, "Holy."

Isaiah's experience of soaking in the presence of absolute holiness brought about a realistic reminder of his own humanity. It's as if he looked around at the angels and the smoke and the trembling temple and the songs and the tongs and concluded, "One of these things is not like the other; one of these things, doesn't belong."

And even though he was made guiltless, and the flaming, searing coal of mercy and forgiveness blotted out his sin, the whole episode is an object lesson in this one unavoidable, undeniable truth: God is holy. We are not. We are human. Or as we like to say, "We're only human." Yet, God does not hide from us. God wants to be found. Jesus came to clear the way from our sin so we can be in the presence of God.

Isaiah's vision tells us something else about the nature of God. Isaiah heard God's voice asking him, "Who will go for me?" This tells us that God's presence commands authority.

You see the death of king Uzziah was more than just a historical marker. It was a sign that a season of change was in the air in Judah. Although Uzziah, during his reign of fifty-two years, took Judah to new heights in terms of prosperity, influence, and power; however, he forgot that he was an earthly king and not a divine one.

Therefore, God needed someone to get his people back on track with God. That's the job God wanted to give to Isaiah. It's in this grand setting, in the holy presence of God that Isaiah answers, "Here I am, send me." It is also true for us that the ever-present and holy God commands our attention and obedience.

The captain on the bridge of a large naval vessel saw a light ahead on a collision course. He signaled, "Alter your course 10 degrees south." The reply came back, "Alter your course 10 degrees north."

The captain then signaled, "Alter your course ten degrees south," I am a captain. The reply: Alter your course ten degrees north. I am a seaman third-class."

The furious captain signaled, "Alter your course ten degrees south. I am a battleship."
The reply: Alter your course ten degrees north. I am a lighthouse."

It is hard for us sometimes to give up control of our lives to trust God. It can be difficult to let go of the need to think we are right about everything. We become defensive when we are challenged to go a different direction with our lives; and when we are questioned about being right. But we are not the ones who hold the authority over all creation...God does. Yet God invites us to participate in helping to build his kingdom.

Isaiah's vision of God is just one of the many mind-blowing stories that challenge us to think about who God is. One of the hardest truths about God for us to comprehend is the Trinity...the Three-in-One...Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Today is Trinity Sunday. As I researched this, I came across a piece that is a wonderful editorial on the Trinity. It was written by Nicholas Thomas Wright. He is a leading New Testament scholar and retired Anglican bishop. I want to read to you what he wrote about the Trinity in "*For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church.*"

He says, "In the church's year, Trinity Sunday is the day when we stand back from the extraordinary sequence of events that we've been celebrating for the previous five months—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost—and when we rub the sleep from our eyes and discover what the word 'god' might actually mean. These events function as a sequence of well-aimed hammer-blows which knock at the clay jars of the gods we want, the gods who reinforce our own pride or prejudice, until they fall away and reveal instead a very different god, a dangerous god, a subversive god, a god who comes to us like a blind beggar with wounds in his hands, a god who comes to us in wind and fire, in bread and wine, in flesh and blood: a god who says to us, 'You did not choose me; I chose you.'

You see, the doctrine of the Trinity, when properly understood, is as much a way of saying 'we don't know' as a way of saying 'we do know.' To say that the true God is Three and One is to recognize that if there is a God then of course we shouldn't expect him to fit neatly into our little categories. If he did, he wouldn't be God at all, merely a god, a god we might perhaps have wanted. The Trinity is not something that the clever theologian comes up with as a result of hours spent in the theological laboratory, after which he or she can return to announce that they've got God worked out now, the analysis is complete, and here is God neatly laid out on a slab. The only time they laid God out on a slab he rose again three days afterwards.

On the contrary: the doctrine of the Trinity is, if you like, a signpost pointing ahead into the dark, saying: 'Trust me; follow me; my love will keep you safe.' Or, perhaps better, the doctrine of the Trinity is a signpost pointing into a light which gets brighter and brighter until we are dazzled and blinded, but which says: 'Come, and I will make you children of light.' The doctrine of the Trinity affirms the rightness, the propriety, of speaking intelligently that the true God must always transcend our grasp of him, even our most intelligent grasp of him."

This really resonates with me. We believe in and commit ourselves to a Holy God who is greater than anything we can possibly comprehend. What does that say about who we are then? It tells me that we are pretty darn special because he calls us his children, and he has gone to great extremes to open the door for us to enter into his presence. Our amazing and holy God does not try to hide from us. God reaches out for us. God believes in us and our abilities to fulfill the goals he sets before us. That's so amazing—so mind-blowing. Think about it, meditate upon it as YOU stand in the presence of our Holy God every day. You are loved by him. You are his child. How does that make you feel? Amen.