

# “PRAISE THE HOLY TRINITY”

May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Holy Trinity

Isaiah 6:1-8

I don't advertise myself as a person who likes creepy, scary things, but I do. Let's just take a quick poll, raise your hand if you are the kind of person who enjoys scary books, horror movies, or haunted houses, etc. I am one of those kinds of people. I don't have some sort of unnatural fascination about it, but I think for the same reasons that people like sky-diving or bungee-jumping, I like to read scary books and feel a little terror. When we raised our hands, though, you may not have noticed, but my wife did not raise her hand. But, praise God that she still married me. I made a pact with her that I would only scare her once a year. The first year we were married, I secretly ordered these very realistic fake spiders from the internet. With a needle, I threaded some fishing line through the back of one of the fake spiders, and the other through the bottom part of the tube of toothpaste. The idea was that when she pulled it out to brush her teeth, the spider would jump out and then hang off the bottom of the tube. It worked out perfectly.

That kind of fear, though, is not at all the kind of fear Isaiah was feeling in our lesson. That was a fear deeper and more real than anything caused by a horror movie or being startled by a spider. This was the fear when you know that you are in the wrong place, that you shouldn't be here—not just because you don't understand everything that's going on, but because you are in true mortal doom. It's like the feeling you get standing on the side of a tall building and looking down. Or, the feeling you might get when your gut tightens up after you realize you forgot to do something important. It was feeling of fear that Isaiah felt.

Now, if the thing you are afraid of is something evil, you can have hope that something good will come and save you. If a child is afraid of the dark, then their mom can come and take care of them. If a person is kidnapped, they can have hope that the police might come. If the building is on fire and their trapped inside, hopefully a firefighter can get them out. But, if you are afraid of something *good*, what can save you from that? Isaiah was terrified of something good.

**“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!’” (Isaiah 6:1-5)**

Isaiah finds himself in the throne room of God. Before him he sees the Lord, high and exalted, his majesty pours out from him. Angels fly around him. Isaiah is filled with fear. He says, **“Woe to me! I am ruined!”** Isaiah knows that he stands in the presence of God and that he is seeing something he should not see. He is a sinful man, and no one who is sinful can see God and live. Isaiah should not be seeing the glory of the one, Holy God.

Even the angels know that. These angels are called seraphs. They have six wings. They use two of them to fly, but the other two they use to protect themselves from God's holiness. They cover their eyes, because of who God is. Even these holy, perfect beings do not want to look at God's majesty. If that is how the angels in heaven act, what does that say about how a human should react? Shouldn't it terrify us who are sinful and unclean? With their other two wings, they cover their feet. In the presence of God, the seraphim have a sense of modesty and humility. Their feet weren't dirty or gross, but they covered them to be perfectly presentable before God.

But, Isaiah was not a holy being like an angel. He had no wings to shield his eyes. He had nothing to cover his dirty feet. "Woe to me! I am ruined!" is the perfect response. What else can he say? Today, as you entered into this sanctuary. As you sat in the pew and looked up toward the cross, did you feel that same fear that Isaiah felt? What makes you think that you can be before your holy God? You are nothing. You cannot hide yourself. Like Isaiah, you must confess: **"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 6:5). Even though we are Christians, we cannot lose this sense of reverence when we come into God's presence. This is a place that we do not belong. Our place is on the outside, cast from God's church, bearing the weight of our doom. It is only because God invites us to come into his presence that we can be here at all. You don't deserve to be here. There's a verse from the book of Habakkuk that I think expresses this perfectly: **"The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him"** (Habakkuk 2:20).

In the midst of Isaiah's fear, one of the angels approaches him. He comes with good news. He comes with the gospel, which takes away all sin. **"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'"** (Isaiah 6:6-7). The angel goes to the altar in the temple. It was made out of brass. It was enormous—so big that they had to build a ramp going up to it. And every day, countless animals were offered on it to God. Those animals each day reminded the people of their sin, and their God who would take away their sin. The sacrifices did not atone for them—they were not what took away their sins. They pointed to the greatest sacrifice that would be offered.

We have an altar in our church. It's beautiful. I'm glad that it's here, but do you know why we have it? Do you know why there is an altar in our sanctuary? Even more than that, do you know why everything that we do in the service is oriented around the altar. For example, you are all facing it right now. Sometimes the pastor will face the altar, sometimes he will face the congregation, but why? It's not just a bunch of theatre. The altar in our churches represents Christ. That's why we have a statue of him on top of it. Everything we do in our church services points to him. We focus on him. It's toward that altar we direct our prayers. It's from that altar that the pastor tells you your sins are forgiven.

So, it's from an altar that this angel takes this coal and presses it to Isaiah's lips. His sin is gone. His guilt is taken away. It's not because of the animals offered on the altar, but because of Christ's sacrifice on the altar of the cross. It's because of that same sacrifice that your sins are gone, too. **"Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."** From God's holy altar, holiness has come to you. In the face of a holy God, you do not need to be afraid. The God you rightly

revere has made you like himself. Our holy Trinity has made us holy. You can live before him guiltfree and sinless.

That's what Isaiah does. His fear is gone. This is not a place he doesn't belong, it's the only place he belongs. This is right. It feels good to stand in the presence of God. One verse of the Bible says, **"Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked"** (Psalm 84:10). That is how Isaiah feels. Can you sense how wonderful it is to step into God's presence. To see the altar and remember Christ, to see the stained glass windows, and think of the light of God's presence. To gather with God's holy people and praise our holy God. Our praises can go up like the angels who see God's holiness and praise it, rather than fear it, because it is better to be here than anywhere else: **"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory"** (Isaiah 6:3).

God is not done with Isaiah. The Trinity speaks. He has a request. **"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'"** (Isaiah 6:8). Notice that he doesn't say, "me." He says, "Whom shall I send?" but then also, "Who will go for us?" With excitement and enthusiasm, Isaiah calls out, **"Here am I. Send me!"** (Isaiah 6:8). The Isaiah who first sees the Lord in this vision could not have said that. He was terrified; he thought he was going to meet his doom. But, no longer—Isaiah is eager to do whatever God calls him to do.

The lesson stops here. It ends on a positive note. I think some people assume that God was going to give Isaiah happy work to do: "Go and tell people how much I love them, etc." It's true that Isaiah would do work like that later on, but that isn't what God tells him to preach now. Here are the next verses that we didn't read:

**"He said, 'Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.'" Then I said, 'For how long, O Lord?' And he answered: 'Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.'" (Isaiah 6:9-12)**

Those are not cheerful thoughts. God was calling Isaiah to preach the law to the nation with this first part of his ministry.

As Christians, God wants us to be excited and ready for the work he has. He has taken away our fear of punishment and made us like himself. We are guiltless and free before him. Be ready for the work that God has called you to do. It doesn't matter what the work is. For Isaiah, it wasn't necessarily happy work, but Isaiah knew who his God was. He was the God who takes away sin and makes them holy. You know who God is, too. Be ready for the work. God takes away your fear. Not just the fear that comes from your sin, but every type. He takes away your fear of talking to your friends and family about Christ. He takes your fear of telling your coworkers. He takes your fear of talking to strangers. Be ready when he calls you. Be excited when his work comes before you. Amen.