

Isaiah 6:1-8 (The Holy Trinity—Series B)
“God’s Holiness is Yours in Christ”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT
May 30, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for this morning is the Old Testament Reading recorded in Isaiah 6:

¹In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. ²Seraphim were standing above Him. Six wings—each had six wings! With two he covered his face; with two he covered his feet; and with two he flew. ³And this one called to that one and said, “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts. All the earth is full of His glory.” ⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook from the sound of the one calling and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵Then I said, “Woe to me, for I am destroyed! For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen Him—Yahweh of hosts.” ⁶And one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched [the coal] upon my mouth and he said, “Behold, this has touched your lips and your guilt is turned aside and your sin is atoned for.” ⁸And I heard the voice of the Lord saying to me, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here I am, send me.”

“Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts. All the earth is full of His glory!”

The only true God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is, in His very nature, being, and essence, holy. He is set apart and exalted far above all of His creation and over all of His creatures. He is seen by the prophet sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. The angels even cover their faces and feet in God’s presence as a sign of His holiness and their unworthiness. Isaiah himself in his book repeatedly uses the phrase “the Holy One” to describe the Lord. As the holy God, He is separate from sin. God is absolutely pure.

That’s the problem, isn’t it? The Triune God is perfectly, completely holy by nature and essence and you and I are not at all holy by nature and essence. Isaiah himself was fully aware of this reality, was he not? He exclaims at the sight, “Woe to me, for I am destroyed!” Isaiah acknowledges that he faces doom and death standing before the completely Holy One, God Himself. “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts, and I am not—woe to me, indeed!”

Isaiah confessed to having “unclean lips,” a mouth that was impure because it was connected to a heart and mind that was sinful and unclean. Jesus said in Matthew 15, “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person” (Matt. 15:18-20 ESV). Our sinful natures inherited from Adam is what makes us unclean, not holy. That original sin with which we are conceived and born manifests itself in all kinds of acts of sin in our thinking, speaking, desiring, and doing. Truly, our words and actions speak volumes, “Look at how great I am! Look at all the good things I’ve done. Look at me, world, and take note!” But while you and I might impress other people with our selfish pride and self-glorification, we certainly do not impress God. And if you want to stand before God, impress Him you must! What is it, then, that would impress God enough for you and me to stand before His holy presence without the fear of wrath, condemnation, and death? Psalm 24:3-4 tells us, “He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

By nature, however, you and I are sinful and unclean. Along with Isaiah, we can only respond to God’s holy presence, saying, “Woe to me! I am destroyed! I am a person of unclean lips!” We whose natures are full of sin cannot love and serve God as we should. Nor can we stand before the King, Yahweh of hosts, because our sinfulness condemns us to face His anger, punishment, and wrath.

So, according to our fallen nature, you and I are not able to serve God perfectly in holiness by keeping His Commandments to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things and to love our neighbors by showing them mercy. We fall far short of His glory. We must realize the infinite distance between the Holy God and us sinful creatures. In the presence of His

holiness, we are nothing but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27). We stand condemned to eternal death by His holiness and justice. There is nothing we can do to merit forgiveness. There is nothing that we can offer God to appease His wrath and displeasure. We broke His Law. We who are unholy stand rightly condemned and punished. "Woe to me for I am destroyed, for I am a person of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

But what happened to Isaiah in his despair and distress over his sinfulness and the fear of God's wrath and punishment? "And one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched [the coal] upon my mouth and he said, "Behold, this has touched your lips and your guilt is turned aside and your sin is atoned for.'"

The thrice holy God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—chose to cleanse Isaiah. God removed the unholiness and the uncleanness of Isaiah's sin so that he might stand before Yahweh, the King, without fear of condemnation and death. God made Isaiah holy out of His pure mercy and grace. Isaiah didn't earn it. He didn't merit it because of good behavior. Isaiah was crushed, "Woe to me! I'm destroyed!" But God in His mercy chose to cleanse Isaiah and atone for his prophet's sin.

Isaiah's forgiveness by means of a burning coal taken from the temple altar pictures the ultimate forgiveness of sins accomplished by the means of God the Son's own blood shed on the altar of the cross. The Son of the Most High left His heavenly throne and took on human flesh in order to live a pure and holy life in humanity's place. Jesus Christ, very God of very God, did what we cannot do. He acted in our place under God's Law and kept it perfectly for us. Jesus then took sinful, unclean humanity's place under God's wrath and judgment

against sin. He bore our sins in His body on the tree of the cross where He suffered hell and itself (1 Peter 2:24). Christ shed His holy, precious blood to make atonement for your sin, taking away your guilt: "The blood of Jesus [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7 ESV).

The necessary sacrifice has been made. Your guilt is taken away; your sin is atoned for by Jesus' blood shed for you on the cross. You are made clean in the blood of Jesus in order to stand before the Lord in righteousness and purity forever. Because of the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Father now declares you in Christ to be holy! Jesus' death and His Easter resurrection won for you the forgiveness of sins, rescued you from the power of death and the devil, and has given to you eternal life.

When you know and realize the magnitude of your sins and just how great the gift of forgiveness and eternal life is that you have freely received through faith in Christ, how can you not respond with hearts and lips cleansed by Jesus' blood with praise and glory to God? It is no longer, "Look at me, world! Look what I have done." Instead, it is "Look at Christ, world! Look what God has done for you through the gift of His Son!" His holiness is now your holiness. His righteousness is now your righteousness. With saving faith in Christ, you now stand before God righteous and holy.

"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim 1:17).