

**St. Paul Lutheran Church  
Grant Park, Illinois  
The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 10, 2019  
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!"*

Have you ever been made speechless by an incredible sight? It could be a fireworks display. The noise, light and smoke leave you with no words to say. Or maybe it is when you find yourself next to a celebrity and all you can do is stand there in shock. Or maybe it is when you are caught red handed doing something wrong. You try to cover it up, but all you can do is mumble your way through because you know you are caught doing something you shouldn't have been doing.

There are many things in life which can leave us speechless and today we encounter one such thing. **“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.’”** Our lesson centers on Isaiah's call into the public ministry. The Lord grants Isaiah a special vision of heaven. Isaiah sees God's glory and his angels with their thunderous voices which shake the foundations of heaven.

The sight is incredible. It is awe inspiring, but it also leaves Isaiah speechless and defeated. How come? You can hear it in his words. **“‘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.’”** What is Isaiah's reaction when he sees the Lord in all his glory? Isaiah is scared. What makes him feel this way?

The Lord's presence leads Isaiah to the uncomfortable realization that he is a sinner who is standing in the presence of someone who is holy. God's holiness causes Isaiah to feel shame and fear because he recognizes he can't talk his way out of his sin. He can't make any kind of excuses. He no longer is able to ignore them because God's holy presence won't let him get away. It calls Isaiah to account for his sins.

Have you ever felt the same terror and shame which Isaiah felt in our lesson? Or maybe I should ask it this way. Have you ever done something you knew was wrong and immediately wished you hadn't done it? You did it even though you knew it was stupid and your guilt ties your stomach up in knots? Do you know the soul sickening feeling I'm talking about? Have you experienced the guilt which floods and drowns a heart?

Maybe it is when your parents strictly told you not to play near a special vase. You ignore what they had to say and are being careless around it and what happens? You knock over the vase and destroy it. Or maybe you lose it on someone and all your yelling does is produce terror in their eyes. Maybe you are mocking someone who considers you a close friend and you turn around to see they heard every nasty word you said about them.

Do you know the uneasy feeling which lives in a grief stricken heart? Do you know what it is like to be caught with no way out? Do you know what it is like to be guilty? If you understand, then you know what Isaiah felt because when sinners stand in God's presence there is no way to get around your sins.

You're guilty and you know it. Your heart trembles and shakes because you're afraid while waiting for judgment.

This is the reaction which the Lord's presence caused in Isaiah's heart. It led Isaiah to cry out, **"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.'"** because Isaiah recognized he was a sinner in the Lord's presence. How does the Lord respond to Isaiah's plea for mercy? (Lord willing this will be our cry for mercy too.)

**"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.'"** The Lord's response to Isaiah's plea speaks directly to Isaiah's troubled heart. The Lord commands one of his seraph's to go to the altar, take one of the coals from the altar and touch Isaiah's lips with it. What was this action to symbolize to Isaiah?

**"See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."** The Lord wanted Isaiah to know and understand what he was doing with those sins which were troubling him. The Lord was cleansing Isaiah from them. He was driving them away and he uses fire to picture the way he cleansed Isaiah from his sins. Fire is a cleansing agent. It rids metals of their impurities. It gets rid of dead trees in a forest.

The Lord pictures his forgiveness in the same way. It cleanses people by driving away their sins. It purifies them from all their unrighteousness. It gets rid of all the bad things and enables people to stand in the Lord's presence without fear. The Lord's forgiveness meant Isaiah didn't need to be afraid. He didn't need to tremble in the Lord's presence anymore. The Lord worked with Isaiah's heart and made it pure and holy in his sight.

How does this apply to us? I mentioned before when sinners come into God's presence we have no place to run or hide. Our sins are laid bare and we cannot excuse them. All we can do is wait for God to justly punish us for the wrong we have done. However, look at the miracle God performs for people who are terrified by his perfection. **"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.'"** The Lord promises he has taken the guilt of our sins away and he has atoned for them. How has the Lord taken away our guilt and atoned for our sins? God didn't use fire to cleanse us from our sins, but he used someone who endured the fires of hell on our behalf. Jesus endured the fires of hell to atone for and cleanse us from our sins.

God didn't simply let our sins slide. He didn't write them off with the stroke of a pen and hide them. He demanded atonement must be made for them. Jesus paid the atonement price for our sins with his life, death and resurrection. Jesus suffered for the times we disobeyed our parents. He willingly endured our punishment for our reckless yelling at people we love. He bore the punishment for the careless words we spoke to cut others down. Jesus endured it all to cleanse you from your sins.

Jesus' love for you has taken away your sins. It has atoned for them and you are now able to stand in the Lord's presence without fear or trembling. You have nothing to worry about because God's love for you in Jesus has cleansed and purified you from your sins. You have nothing to hide and nothing to feel guilty about because Jesus' love has made you holy in God's sight. The uneasy and guilt stricken conscience no longer needs to bother you.

How do you respond to such love? **"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!'"** Isaiah responds by asking the Lord to send him out to do his work in the world. Believers who have been cleansed from their sins can learn a lot from Isaiah's bold example. You and I have been cleansed from our sins. We love this truth, but the question becomes: does everyone you know believe this truth?

There are people in your lives who either don't know this truth or maybe they have willfully or not so willfully forgotten the way God feels about sin and what he has done to give us salvation. God doesn't want these people to remain in this state. He wants his followers to share his message of forgiveness and salvation with others. This means you and I have work to do, don't we? God wants each one of us to work at sharing his message with others.

Yet, doesn't our sinful nature often rebel at the thought? Me, share God's word with others? That's pastor's job or one of the elders. It isn't my responsibility. I'm scared. I don't know what to say. I'd get it wrong. Send someone else. The temptation is powerful and easy to embrace because it allows a believer to be lazy rather than to put the hard work of sharing God's word in. However, is this really the attitude which God wants his forgiven children to have? Let someone else do it because I don't want to?

No, God rightly calls this attitude sinful. He calls us to repent and be renewed in our calling as Christians. He wants us to respond with Isaiah's confidence, **"Here am I. Send me!"** Now, where exactly will God send us? Each one of us has a special place we can go. Some of you have kids who have turned away. Some of you have neighbors who don't know Jesus. You have coworkers or friends who don't know him. We each have a mission field.

How can the Lord use you to reach those people? You can pray for boldness to share Jesus with those people. You can pray for the right opportunity to share the word with them. You can invite them to come to Jesus' house because you want them to hear Jesus' voice speak to them. You can pray for the Lord to bless your efforts and to give you a willing heart to share his message with others. You can respond with Isaiah, **"Here am I. Send me!"** Amen.