

June 7, 2009
Holy Trinity

"Holy! Holy! Holy!"

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. ² 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. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ "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." ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 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!"

"The Gods Must Be Crazy!" That was the name of a rather strange independent low budget film from the 1980's. It starts out with an airplane pilot from the 1940's, resplendent with goggles, flying an open air biplane over a jungle region of southern Africa. He is shown drinking a bottle of Coke a Cola and then tossing it out of the plane. It drops through the jungle canopy from leaf to limb and lands safely on the jungle floor beneath. There it was discovered by a remote jungle tribe that thought at first it was a gift from the gods. As tribe members fought over having possession of this mysterious glass bottle, they realized it was more of a curse than a blessing. The rest of the movie deals with one tribe member taking the Coke bottle as far away from the tribe as possible to get rid of the curse.

The prophet Isaiah had to live at a time when God's people were going after strange and crazy gods of the ancient Canaanites, gods with names like Baal and Ashtoreth. The worship of these gods involved sexual immorality and even the sacrifice of children. It wasn't just the gods who were crazy. The people of Israel who followed these false gods were also crazy. Listen to what the Lord says in Isaiah chapter one. "They have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel."

The Lord did not give up on his people even though they were acting crazy and following crazy gods. He called Isaiah to turn the hearts of people back to him. He prepared Isaiah for this tough assignment by giving him a vision of glory he would never forget. Isaiah would always remember the words sung by the angels, words we still sing today, "Holy! Holy! Holy!"

Holy in majesty

We are told that Isaiah received this vision from the Lord in the year that King Uzziah died. Uzziah was a good king who ruled for 52 years. The forces of idolatry that were held in check during his reign are about to break loose again throughout the land. Isaiah will

need this vision from the Lord to prepare him for the tough job of telling the people that they have hardened their hearts against the Lord. Isaiah sees the Lord "seated a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." Have you ever noticed how your dreams will blend places or events together in one dream? The Lord shows himself to Isaiah in a vision seated on a throne, not in some royal gilded palace, but seated high on a throne in the temple. Notice how the train of his robe fills the temple. Remember the wedding where the bride had such a long train on her gown it took two attendants to help her turn around? The train of the Lord's robe fills the temple. It is a reminder to us this morning that God's glory fills the world in which we are living, as we sing in the children's son, "He has the whole world in his hands."

In his book, "The Language of God," the famous scientist Francis Collins who headed up the Human Genome Project describes how it took over 13 years to record and set down the complex information contained in the DNA molecules of every cell of your body. The coding in the so called "simple cell" would fill enough 8.5 by 11 sheets to create a stack of paper as high as the Washington Monument. In this book he tells how the evidence of design he saw in the cells led him to give up his agnostic belief system and believe there must be a God who designed all this. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord fill the temple. Francis Collins saw the glory of the Lord in the tremendous complexity of the simple human cell you look at under a microscope in a high school classroom.

The Lord wanted Isaiah to see more. He saw "seraphs, each with six wings; with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying." These seraphs are a level of God's angels, mentioned only in this part of the Bible. They use their wings to shield their feet and faces from God's glory and with the other wings they fly. They cover their faces and feet in awe of God's majesty.

Isaiah not only sees with his eyes but hears with his ears the seraphs calling out to each in a loud voice, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Their voices are so loud the doorposts and thresholds begin to shake and the temple is filled with smoke. When we were kids on the family farm we would take other kids who came to visit to the railroad bridge that crossed the river on the edge of the farm. We would stand under the steel bridge and wait for train to come. It was so loud that if we yelled out loud we could not overcome the overpowering sound of the train. Isaiah hears the loud, deafening sound of angels calling out: "Holy! Holy! Holy!" He sees the angels flying in midair. He feels the temple shake and he smells the smoke. Remember where you were when the earthquake hit a few years ago in Paso Robles. Isaiah never forgot what he experienced that day, and he never forgot the words the angels sang, "Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

The God that reveals himself here on the pages of the Bible is a holy God. The word for "Holy" in Hebrew is "Kadosh." The Lord our God is Kadosh, holy and separate and different from other gods like Baal, and Allah. He is three persons yet one God. You were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You hear this blessing from the Lord at the end of worship: "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you. The Lord look on you with favor." With our faith eyes we see the glory of the Lord as he has revealed himself to us as three persons and one God.

In his book "Confessions" the church father Augustine describes how difficult it was for

him to come to believe that three persons are one God. The story is that he was walking along the beach, and saw a little boy carrying water from the ocean into a hole he had dug in the sand. He heard the boy say he was going to take all the water in the ocean and put it into his little hole. Then it dawned on him that he was trying to do the same with his tiny little mind how as he tried to grasp and understand how three persons can be one God instead of simply accepting the truth as God has revealed it to us on the page of the Bible.

A few years ago there was a religious survey asking people why they attend church. I am sure some said because of the friendliness and love of the people, but most of those who responded said, "I attend church to experience God in my life." People want God in their lives but often just enough of God to make them feel comfortable and not uncomfortable. Anytime people experience a full measure of God's glory in their lives it makes them feel very uncomfortable because they realize how far they fall short of this God is holy, holy, holy. That was certainly the case with Isaiah who was totally frightened by God's majesty until the Lord revealed his mercy to him.

Holy in mercy

Isaiah reacts to what he saw, heard, smelled and felt with these words, "Woe to me. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." When Isaiah says he is ruined he is using a strong word that implies he is lost, without hope. He saw himself as something worthless in the sight of God because of the unclean things that had come across his lips.

How clean are your lips? Look into the mirror. Think of the words that have come across your lips this past week. Were there any bad words? Ephesians says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths." Do your words always reflect a life that reflects on the tremendous blessings the Lord has given you, or is there way too much grumbling and complaining? Philippians 4 reminds us, "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things." If we are not thinking about the beautiful things the Lord gives us, especially his love for us in Jesus, we will so easily sink down into the sewer of constantly talking about bad things to the exclusion of all the blessings the Lord has given us. "Woe to me. I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." With Isaiah we confess "I am ruined."

The Lord who showed Isaiah his majesty also showed his mercy. "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.' Normally we would not want a hot coal to touch our lips, but remember this is a vision. Notice what Isaiah did to cleanse his sin. Notice what he did. He did nothing. The process of cleansing was totally in the hands of the Lord. Someday we will join the angels in heaven to sing a beautiful song to Jesus that has these words in it, "Salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb."

The angel took the hot coal from the altar of the Lord. The altar of the Lord with sacrifices of sheep and goats pictured the sacrifice that Jesus would make for the sins of the world. Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. John writes in his epistle,

"Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." Today God brings this sacrifice of Jesus to us here in the pages of the Bible. He gives us the very body and blood of Jesus in bread and wine to offer us what was offered to Isaiah. "Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for." There is a reason we sing the Sanctus, the "Holy, Holy, Holy" right before communion. The glory of God comes to you when you receive the very body and blood of the Lord. If only the room would shake and fill with smoke and angels would sing these words to us every time we take Holy Communion. How fitting that would be!

The gods may be crazy and the people are certainly crazy as they invent false gods for themselves. When the Lord offers you the opportunity to talk about the true God, Father Son and Holy Spirit join Isaiah in joyfully saying, "Here am I. Send me." Amen.