

**READING: Isaiah 6:1-8 (Narrative Lectionary)**

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. 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. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

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

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

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!"

(word of God, word of life... **Thanks be to God**)

**SERMON**

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, thank you for this new day. We thank you for this place that we gather in, and for the people who gather here. Send your Holy Spirit upon us. Send your Holy Spirit upon me so that some word of mine might be some word of yours for someone who needs to hear it this morning. Amen.*

Dear friends,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Creator and from Jesus Christ, his Son, our Rescuer and Redeemer. Amen.

It's a time of national uncertainty and political upheaval. Is the government stable?

What does the future successor look like? Who is on the transition team and what are they going to do? Will the transition be smooth or full of judgment, accusations and uprisings? Sound familiar? That's where we find ourselves now in our country.

But I was actually describing Isaiah's world in 742 B.C.E. This again is the context in which we hear this scripture this morning. The King of Israel, King Uzziah of the northern Kingdom, was dead. He had been on the throne for 50 years. We whine and complain and can hardly imagine 4 or even 8 years of anybody, regardless of who you voted for.

This was a time of national turmoil and threats of invasion from forces on all sides.

There was uncertainty on many fronts, just like we have today. So we are not as unique as we'd like to think. What about stability and royal succession?

After 50 years of certainty their earthly kingship was now in transition.

Enter the priest Isaiah. You might recall that only priests were allowed into the holy of holies in the temple. It is here that in the midst of earthly and national turmoil Isaiah is reminded that even though the earthly kingship is in flux the heavenly kingship is secure.

The Lord God is **indeed** sitting on the throne as he was and is and is to come. Now you have to use your wildest imagination. Kids, as usual, will have the advantage on this one since they are so good at letting the imaginations run wild. Now all of us have to do the same.

Isaiah has a grand vision. It's a marvelous Steven Spielberg-like vision complete with six-winged flying seraphs carrying hot burning coals. With their 6 wings they fly, they cover their feet and their faces. The glory of God was even too intense for them and they had to protect their own faces. Seraphs are powerful majestic angelic figures. These are not the cute little cherub angels with little wings that we will hang our Christmas trees and see in Christmas cards. These are six-winged heavenly beings full of power and might surrounding the throne of God.

Webster Definition: *an angelic being, regarded in traditional Christian angelology as belonging to the highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy, associated with light, passion, enthusiasm, and purity.*

In addition to their usual power and majesty they also bring hot burning coals for purification. The vision is so powerful that the text says the room shook and filled with smoke.

The seraphs proclaimed the majesty and eternal kingship of God: *holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*"

We echoed that proclamation in our gathering hymn: *Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty. Merciful and mighty, God in three persons, perfect in power and love and purity, cherubim and seraphim fall down before you.*

Isaiah is in the presence of the one holy and awesome God. In the Old Testament view that usually meant only one thing...you were going to die.

Isaiah realizes his sinfulness and cries out "*woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.*" The Living Bible puts it in clearer language: *My doom is sealed, for I am a foul-mouthed sinner, a member of a sinful, foul-mouthed race;*"

In the presence of the holy God, Isaiah was humbled. He saw himself exposed as the sinner that he was...a man of unclean lips, a foul-mouthed sinner. In this election cycle we certainly heard and maybe even spoke words from our own unclean lips, individually and as a culture. If you've spent any time on Facebook or social media, or have watched TV, you have seen it. Unfortunately, much of that is continuing.

One nation under God? Who can tell? We sure don't act like it in the ways we treat and disrespect each other. Lord, have mercy on us!

One nation under God...one God...Christians, Jews, Muslims and others. In our arguments about language maybe that's what we need to include in the pledge...one nation under ONE God. We are a broken nation and a broken world.

The nasty words and now added destructive actions, even in the cities and towns of Montana, are working hard to destroy our brothers and sisters rather than building each other up as the body of Christ. On Friday the pro-Nazi displays in Missoula prompted the Jewish rabbi there to request additional law enforcement presence at their synagogue.

That is NOT ok.

Unfortunately, Montana is no stranger to white supremacy groups and their actions.

In the midst of turmoil and uncertainty...in times of fear and anxiety God issued a call to Isaiah: *Whom shall I send as a messenger to my people? Who will go?"*  
*And Isaiah said, "Lord, I'll go! Send me."*

That's where our reading ends for today. But if you read on in the text you will see that Isaiah will be proclaiming a difficult message; it will be hard to hear. The Word of God is sometimes judgment and tough to hear. But it is also a Word full of grace, forgiveness, cleansing and renewal. Before Isaiah answered God's call, he admitted his own sinfulness before God. He was humbled and exposed in the presence of the almighty God. He was open to cleansing and renewal and he was forgiven. It's a dramatic image in this text and the cleansing tool is fire. *Then one of the mighty angels flew over to the altar and with a pair of tongs picked out a burning coal. He touched my lips with it and said, "Now you are pronounced 'not guilty' because this coal has touched your lips. Your sins are all forgiven.* Isaiah was not condemned to death because of his sin but by the grace of God, **he was forgiven.** *"Now you are pronounced 'not guilty' .Your sins are all forgiven.* He was cleansed and given new life, purified with holy fire and ready to start over. Now Isaiah, now that you are cleansed and renewed...what are you going to do? By your leading, I will go, Lord...send me.

There are words of hope and promise in this text for us, too. Though there is turmoil and uncertainty in our earthly authority-- the heavenly authority, God the creator of the universe, the one holy God ....Our heavenly kingship is secure. God hasn't gone anywhere and God isn't going anywhere. The Lord is indeed sitting on the throne as he was and is and is to come. No matter who you voted for or even if you chose not to vote...now what? It's easy to plaster flags and post religious phrases on Facebook. It's not so easy to live it out in our words and actions. Flags and phrases fade away but the word of God remains forever. **That's** our foundation. Trust in that foundation. Anchored in that trust we are called into action.

Isaiah's call is our call: *Who will speak my word to my people?* God asks each one of us. Each call is unique and everyone, regardless of age, has a special call. I pray that we all respond: *Here I am, Lord....send me.* There is gospel work to do....just like there was yesterday and last week. Our call to do gospel work doesn't depend on who the president is or isn't. Our call to do gospel work cannot get lost in this transition. Gospel work includes: confession, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation. It includes listening, speaking words of hope and doing actions of grace. It includes exposing others (maybe even ourselves), including friends and family members when they are the ones who are being hurtful or hateful. Gospel work is hard work. It is often unpopular and uncomfortable work.

Eating with sinners? Sitting with tax collectors and prostitutes? Caring for women and children and prisoners? Praying for enemies? Gospel work is often unpopular and uncomfortable. Gospel work leads to a cross...but through the cross is resurrection. We are **all** God's holy people, cleansed and forgiven by God's holy fire, washed in the renewing waters of our baptism. Through God's holy fire and life-giving water our highest calling is to work for justice. That doesn't mean we have to agree with or approve of

everyone's lifestyles or opinions. But it **does** mean that we are called to justice work...to speak up for the poor and those who are often left out.

We share from our abundance to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger.

We remember our veterans and make sure they are cared for and valued .

For those who are targeted and live in fear and uncertainty: immigrants, refugees, members of the LGBT community and all minority groups, we are God's voice of hope, peace and justice.

God will work through the choices we have made as individuals, as a church and as a nation.

Through God's grace we stand.

We are flawed but we are forgiven.

We are sent out from here confident in God's power and not our own.

What words will we speak? What words of grace and healing will we share?

From Psalm 19: *Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts*

*be acceptable to you, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer.*

*AMEN.*

AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM (renewing our "call") (insert)

Sing "Here I Am, Lord"