

Holy, Holy, Holy Isaiah 6:1-8 TrinityB 5-27-18

We just sang of the holiness of the God who reveals himself as God in three persons, blessed Trinity. We sang what angels in Isaiah's vision sang, Holy Holy Holy. It is the Holy in Holy Trinity I will focus on today. The mystery is in the Trinity, but the glory is in the Holy. We can see that glory in Isaiah's vision.

Isaiah is in the temple, where God has always promised to be present, accessible, known to his people. Jesus called His body the temple, which would be destroyed and raised again on the third day. He was what Isaiah called Him later: Immanuel, God with us.

It was year King Uzziah died. Though he was faithful in his 52 year reign, he became proud in later years. He presumed to offer incense in the temple, a duty reserved only for the priests. When confronted, he became angry, and God gave him leprosy for the rest of his life. He left the temple unclean because of His pride.

In His vision, Isaiah is called to be messenger of the warning and hope from God to his people. That role falls to us, not as specifically as it did for this prophet, but generally as God's voice of law and grace.

But he wants Isaiah, and by extension us, first to see what this God is really like in his holiness and glory. For how can we proclaim to the world a holy God if we do not ourselves understand what it means that He is holy?

In the temple, the seraphs, the angels with six wings, stand ready to serve the Lord. They call out to one another, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts. The traditional view is that crying out Holy three times to emphasize that all the persons of the Trinity are holy.

Holy means two very important things. One, that God is unapproachable, unreachable, separate, independent of his creation. Secondly, it means that He is pure, separated from sin. Nothing unclean or sinful may be in His presence. Even the seraphim must cover their eyes in the splendor of the almighty.

Thus Uzziah was ushered out the temple, unclean in heart and body. And it didn't take Isaiah long to realize that he was doomed. A man of unclean lips, from where we express the sin in our hearts, cannot be in the presence of the complete holiness of God and live to tell about it. Nor can the nation.

The Lord hears his woeful cry and sends a seraph to touch his lips with coals from the incense altar. What that means Isaiah doesn't have to guess. The seraph tells him the meaning of the coal to his mouth. His guilt has been removed, and his sin atoned for. Unlike Uzziah, who left unclean because of the misuse of the altar's gifts, Isaiah who enters as a man who is unclean, leaves as one who is clean because of the gifts on the altar.

This foreshadows the gifts we receive from God's altar today. The coals by themselves would mean nothing to Isaiah, but with the words of absolution by the messenger of God he believes what is true: He is forgiven. From the altar, you receive what has been sacrificed for you so that your sins may be forgiven. The bread and wine touch your lips, but they are not mere bread and wine. By the Word of God, spoken by the messenger of God, your guilt is removed. Luther said it this way: the *"words, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins, along with the bodily eating and drinking are the main thing in the sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say, "forgiveness of sins."*

The Holy Trinity is not just a concept that is impossible to grasp with our mind. The holiness of God is a mountain we cannot climb. It is so far above us that we cannot attain it. Had God wanted to leave us in the contaminated dust of this sin-filled world, we would merely call him the Holy Unity.

But he loved what he created. He came in the flesh, reached down to make clean that which was unclean. Not just to speak holiness to our lives, but to create it by the cleansing blood of His Son, God in flesh, so that way believe what He declares, Your guilt has been removed. Your sin has been forgiven.

We sing Holy, Holy, Holy with a humble heart. We sing it with a grateful heart, for as the composer penned, "though the eye of sinful man, Thy glory cannot see", he has come to us that we may see in the face of Jesus the holiness of God. In Christ we not only can see God and live, but we can live to tell about it. For that he sends us into the world, beginning here.

Amen.