

## Isaiah 6:1-8

This weekend is Memorial Day weekend, typically celebrated as the beginning of summer, and here in the church, the time we take a break from many of the church activities. Bible study is on hiatus until fall, choir practice will resume in the fall, church council will take one month off in the summer. As we wind down our activities it isn't too early to look ahead and plan for this fall. It will be here in the blink of an eye. Where is it that God is leading us in ministry, what might our mission be in the rest of 2024? And beyond? A suggestion may be found in our first lesson from the book of Isaiah where God calls Isaiah.

Isaiah was disheartened. Uzziah had been a good king, now he was dead, and another king would take his place. With the history of Israel, the king would probably lead them down the paths of sinful idolatry. Isaiah went to the temple to worship God, a good place to go as our psalm today said, "And in the temple of the Lord all are crying, 'Glory!' The Lord sits enthroned above the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as King forevermore." And that is exactly what Isaiah saw in the temple, a vision that God is on his throne and the true King of Israel reigns.

As Isaiah's vision goes, he saw the hem of the robe of the Lord God fill the temple. The Bible's description of The First Temple suggests that the structure was 180 feet long, 90 feet wide, and 50 feet high. That's 16,200 square feet. Those of you who went to Olmsted Manor a couple of years ago, it's about the size of the manor house where we stayed; to those of you who didn't go, it's an 8 bedroom house, 3 stories tall, with a full basement. Imagine a structure about that size. Only the hem of the Lord God's robe filled the structure. Isaiah encountered the triune God in all God's majesty and glory. He encountered the Three-in-One who defies description whom we celebrate today.

What would your reaction be if you were suddenly, unexpectedly, in the very real presence of God? With an opportunity to lay all his problems on God, to ask God to take away illness, to feed the hungry, to comfort those who are mourning, what did Isaiah do? Isaiah realized his sinfulness and confessed his own, and even his nation's sinfulness. That seems like a strange thing to do, to admit to God that he, Isaiah, was not a great person, that he had made mistakes that hurt people, that he didn't deserve to be in the presence of the Lord God. It seems like a strange reaction when we consider that, according to a poll done in 2020 by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, about half of the population of America believes that good works can earn them a place in heaven, and they will be judged fundamentally good by God. Martin Luther himself said that the majority of people who hear God's Word are proud and presumptuous (Luther's Works, vol 16, p.73). Yet it is only when Isaiah finds himself in the presence of God that he confessed his sin. When we are truly in the presence of God we begin to feel and know that we are sinners.

As if all of this isn't strange enough, things begin to get even stranger. God had a purpose for meeting with Isaiah in the temple that day. God wanted a volunteer to do ministry in the land of Judah. One of God's emissaries, a seraph, an angel, carried the burning piece of coal using tongs, and touched Isaiah's lips, and his sins were forgiven. Martin Luther compared this cleansing of his lips to our baptism. Only after the sins are forgiven does God ask for a volunteer to go to Judah. And Isaiah responded: "Here I am, send me!" Isaiah's ministry began with a word of forgiveness, it began with God's forgiving love.

So what does this story have to do with our church's ministry? What does this story have to do with the Trinity? It has everything to do with our congregation's mission because we are basically in the same position Isaiah was in when he entered the temple. God's people are always being called to do God's work. God is always calling churches to become more active. Are you listening to God's call right now? If so, what is holding us back?

Like Isaiah we often think we are not we are not good enough, that we are not equipped to do what God wants us to do. And in a way, that's a good thing because then we can admit that mistakes will be made, forgiveness will be needed. I know I often feel as though I don't have what it takes to do what God is asking of me. But if we leave it at that, if we leave it at the place where we think we are imperfect, nothing will get done. We have a God who does not let human imperfection get in the way of doing God's will. Remember, God touched Isaiah's lips with a hot coal and his guilt was removed, Isaiah was forgiven, and only then did God ask him to work. God will use anyone who steps up and volunteers. God does not call the equipped, God equips the called. God's love will carry us over the hump, will compensate for our inadequacies, will even cover the dumb mistakes we will make.

Unconditional love, always ready to forgive, is the very essence of the triune God of ours who we celebrate today on Holy Trinity Sunday. A God who is three persons but one God is always in relationship, always giving. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always sharing, loving each other. Saint Augustine describes the very essence of the triune God in terms of love: "therefore, the Holy Spirit, what it is, is something common to both the Father and the Son. But the communion in itself is of the same substance, and they exist together in eternity; and it may fitly be called friendship, but is more aptly called love."

God is always loving. God calls Isaiah and us to a mission of spreading that sort of love. Of course, that mission to which we are called is a mission of love---to do the loving thing in all the works of this church, in all the things we do in our homes. Martin Luther nicely explained what this mission is, what our life is for. He wrote, "We have no other reason for living on earth than to be of help to others." When you think you cannot do anything remember prayer is the highest form of helping others.

If we are to undertake a renewal of our mission and ministry this fall there will be difficulties, setbacks, and struggles. There will be times when we feel like giving up or not even showing up. But when those times come, remember Isaiah. Hold tight to the loving God who forgives us for our mistakes. That makes it easier to put up with our own inadequacies. It also makes it a little easier to forgive and forget the pain others inflict on us too. If God forgives them, why shouldn't we? That's the mission a holy, loving God sends to us to do.

All glory be to God.