

Sermon Holy Trinity 2018

May 27, 2018

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! We say those words week in and week out, Holy is the Lord of Sabaoth, of the heavenly hosts, the military of heaven. This God is holy. But what does that even mean? We say that and yet we make every effort to make God unholy, to make Him as much like us as possible. In the words that I've heard attributed to Mark Twain, "God created man in his own image, and man, being a gentleman returned the favor." Of course whether Twain said that, or someone else, the point is clear that they think we came up with an idea of God after what we want Him to be. I think it's actually more profound than that. I think it's so accurate. In the beginning God created us holy like Him, but then we fell into sin, and now we try to conceive of Him in all of our broken and unholy ways.

And then we see this picture of Him in Isaiah. Here Isaiah is apparently in the Temple, where the Ark of the Covenant would have been, the center of worship, and He sees a vision of the throne of God. In other words, He sees a vision of Heaven. And what does He see? Just like John sees in the fourth chapter of his Revelation, Isaiah sees the heavenly host around the throne of God calling out, "**Holy, Holy, Holy!**" He sees the angels before God crying with all their might about the holiness of our God.

Now as I say that, we have to ask what this means, don't we? After all, this is sort of a word we throw around and yet what does it really mean? Merriam Webster says it well: "*exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness.*" There we see it: God is exalted—like Isaiah says, "lifted up"—He is exalted and worthy of our devotion. Why? Because He is perfectly good and perfectly righteous. In fact, as we are celebrating the feast of the Holy Trinity, we can think of it a bit like this. Obviously the whole Godhead, the whole Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is Holy, but what we say is that the Son and the Holy Spirit receive their divinity and holiness from the Father. They receive their goodness and righteousness from the Father. In light of this we can say that when God created the world—which you might recall creation included the Father making all things, but doing so with the presence of the Spirit and through the Son—but when God created the world we see that He also made it good. However, even beyond that when He made man, He made man in His

own image. He made man as righteous and good, just like He is. So in Trinitarian theology we can say that we were created in the image of our Heavenly Father.

But then what happened? Then man fell and he became no longer good and righteous in this way. You could say we had been created as holy beings in the beginning, then we rebelled against God and became the opposite. We became unholy. Now instead of reflecting God's goodness and righteousness, we do what He's told us not to do. Now we don't love, we kill, we rebel, we abuse, we lust and commit adultery and we steal. And worst of all we create all sorts of gods in His place.

With that fall then, we see a distinction that comes about in the Old Testament—the distinction between the Holy and the Common. Now in our day, just as I said that we had lost the understanding of God being holy, we have lost this distinction too. To be clear, Christ has made all things clean so that there is no longer food we can't eat, like the Israelites had. There is no longer the aspect that I have to wash to purify myself after coming into contact with someone's skin lesion. But there is still that which is holy and that which is not.

Now if I might take a tangent for a second as we see that we've lost this distinction, I'll acknowledge that there are some good things that have come from this. For example it helps us with understanding that we can pray anywhere, or read the Bible anywhere. It also helps us to know that you don't have to be a pastor or do something in the front of the Church Service to be a good Christian. But unfortunately, even though those things are good, with the loss of the distinction we don't understand that we can pray anywhere because God has made us holy, that we serve in other vocations because God has made us holy. Even further then we've lost the understanding that things like disease and death were considered unclean was because of their association with the consequences of falling into sin. And worst of all we've lost the understanding that God in His pure goodness and righteousness can't just let sin be swept under the rug.

In our day, having lost this understanding, we've taken the humble prayer that God would receive me just as I am, knowing I have no plea before Him besides Christ's holy sacrifice, and we have turned that into an arrogant excuse to continue in sin and laziness. "God knows my heart, so my devotion doesn't have to have any outward expression." In fact, this week I read an article from a great satire site called The Babylon Bee which poked fun at this—like good satire does—saying that Greek Scholars had determined that the word "Repent" was better translated as "You do you." It also

had them saying that repentance is better described as “believing in yourself and following your dreams, rather than changing one’s mind and turning one’s life around.” Now obviously, like I said, that is satire poking fun at this idea, but it’s unfortunately how God is often perceived in our day. He is perceived as the One who just wants to affirm you in your goals, and your dreams, and your life.

But is this what we see? Look at Isaiah in that throne room. Is that Isaiah’s response before God? “God here I am just as I am!” No! What does he say? **“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”** He says, “My goose is cooked, I’m a rotten sinner and I’ve seen God!” And then what happens? Isaiah says, **“Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’”** What happens? The coal from the altar touches Isaiah’s lips and brings atonement.

Now to take a second and explain this, this coal would either have been from the altar of incense right in front of the curtain hiding the Holy of Holies, the altar where Zechariah was offering the daily prayer with incense when Gabriel promised that he would have a son, John the Baptist, or it was from the altar of the burnt offerings where sacrifices were made. I think it was the latter, because of the atonement. Because it makes sense that this coal would come from where the blood was shed. You see that’s what sin deserves, it deserves life to be taken. Sin separates man from God who is man’s life, and so it requires life to restore that relationship. In other words, sin, lawlessness, iniquity, these things deserve atonement, like the seraphim said.

In the Holy Trinity, as you know, we see this in the Son, in Jesus. He entered into this unholy and broken world, and He took on your unholy and broken sin, and He carried that on His shoulders shedding His holy blood for you, dying for you that your guilt would be taken away. I know I’ve mentioned this before, but this is why I bow during the Nicene Creed when it says that Jesus was “made man.” What an amazing mystery this is! The perfectly holy, good, and righteous God has entered into human flesh to take on our unholy, wicked, and unrighteous sin! God made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. And that is the joy of the resurrection, Christians. He now, by His resurrection, by His ascension, and by sending us His Holy Spirit, He makes us holy.

Think about what we saw with Isaiah. He called himself a man of unclean lips, dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips, and what happened? The angel touched his lips bringing atonement from the altar to Isaiah. Now Isaiah's lips were being cleansed because he was being called to preach the Lord's Word. But this is what the Holy Spirit does for you. He brings the atonement from the altar of the cross and He gives it to you, not just to your lips but your whole being. What Jesus has done, the Holy Spirit brings it to you covering over your sin with the holiness of Jesus. And how does He do it? He baptizes you and washes you in that blood.

I said that before about us not having to wash to cleanse ourselves like they did in the Old Testament, but we are washed before coming to the altar aren't we? In fact, there is an aspect where that water even becomes a holy thing. That's why I'll pour it out on the ground after a baptism. I don't keep it for blessing myself with special holiness, but it becomes different, set apart for God's holiness by the attachment of His Word to it—making you holy through it.

And how else does the Holy Spirit make you holy? With the holy body and blood of Jesus. Again, that's why I consume as much as is possible of the elements, and why we shouldn't just throw any away, they bear a holiness now by God's Word. Not a holiness for us to worship, but to honor by respecting it, knowing that as Jesus' body and blood are in, with, and under the bread and wine, the Spirit brings that holiness to us through them. In fact in the early church before the Lord's Supper they used to say, "The holy things for the holy people!"

And lastly by the word. The Spirit comes in His strong Word bespeaking you righteous, holy, set apart for God. In the Word the Spirit takes away your sin and restores that image in which you were originally created. He makes you no longer a sinner before God, but one who has had your sin covered by the righteousness of Jesus.

And in this we along with the heavenly hosts that Isaiah saw, also cry out to God in His holiness, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the Lord of Sabaoth." We say that in the service as He comes to us in His Word and the body and blood of Jesus. And by the grace of the Holy Trinity, God will hear our singing those words eternally. The Holy Father who made us in his image in the beginning, the Holy Son who carried our unholiness to the cross, and the Holy Spirit who brings the Son's redemption to us making us holy again in Him. Amen.