

## Sermon for June 3, 2012 – Holy Trinity

Isaiah 6:1-8

### Theme: Holy, Holy, Holy.

- 1) Come before him a sinner
- 2) Leave with Him a saint

*1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "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!" 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." (ESV)*

What kind of attitude does God want you to have when you come into His house? King David tells us in Psalm 51: "*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*" (Psalm 51:8) In other words, God does not want us to come to worship all proud about who we are and what we have done for Jesus. Rather, He wants us to confess our total sinfulness and need for his forgiveness.

Today we are going to consider what it means to come into the presence of God, under the theme: **Holy, Holy, Holy** 1) *Come before him a sinner.* 2) *Leave with Him a saint.*

### Part One: Come before him a sinner

At the beginning of the service, right before we confessed our sins, I spoke these words: "We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children."

What exactly does it mean "to come into the presence of God"? Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he is with them. (Matthew 18:20). We are gathered in Jesus name, so he is with us. We are in his presence.

How do you picture Jesus' presence? Do you picture Jesus sitting in a pew in front? Do you picture him standing behind me, directing my words to the congregation?

Listen to what Isaiah saw when he was taken into God's presence: "*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*" What a sight that must have been! The LORD is so big that King Solomon once confessed: "*Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!*" (1 Kings 8:27) When we come into the presence of God, we are like ants approaching the empire state building.

Isaiah continues: "*Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*" The Seraphim are holy angels - powerful and mighty. There is not the least speck of sin in them. If there were any creature we would imagine able to look God in the face, it would be these angels. And yet they don't. They cover their faces before the Lord's holiness. They cover their feet, showing that even they do not want to approach God promoting their deeds and endeavors – their "walk," so to speak. Instead they cry out: "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*"

The angels confess God as holy, as "set apart" from anything else that exists. They confess him to be three times holy - thereby acknowledging that God is three persons and yet one God. Most importantly, they sing the praises of God's work! Take note of that, dear Christian. They do not sing about their own holiness and works before God, but of God's works

for us! If they, the holy angels, do not even think of approaching God saying, "Look at what I have done for you!", what makes us sinful human beings think that we can?

And what happened when Isaiah heard their praise? *"The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke."* The scene reminds us of Mt. Sinai, when the LORD made his presence known among the Israelites and they trembled with fear. (cf. Exodus 18:19-20)

And what was Isaiah's response to seeing such a scene, to being in the presence of the holy, almighty God? *"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!"*

Take Isaiah's response to heart. In the presence of God He confessed his total sinfulness! Isaiah was terrified. Why? Because he was not holy. He remembered his proud boasts, his reliance on himself. He remembered the sins of his youth and the lusts of his heart. He remembered how there were many times he put other things like his family and desire for material things before God. Isaiah knew his sin, and his sins terrified him! He came before God confessing his unworthiness.

Brothers and sisters, we have come into the presence of the holy God. Jesus promised that when we gather in his name, he is with us. Now we might be tempted to think: "Isaiah must have seen God the Father. Jesus would not have been so scary." I want to draw your attention so something St. John wrote in His Gospel. After quoting a few verses from this very chapter of Isaiah, John writes: *"Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him."* (John 12:41 NIV) Just think about that for a moment: our sermon text is Isaiah's vision of Jesus!

We have come into the presence of God! When we look around we see a pleasant Church and wonderful people and we are tempted to just think that's all there is. But our eyes of faith understand that we have come into the presence of God. We have come into the same temple Isaiah entered in his vision. We have come before the same great and glorious Jesus who is present with his angels. God, in his mercy, does not allow us to see this sight with our physical eyes because he knows that we would not be able to handle it, but what Isaiah describes is nevertheless the reality. You are in exactly the same place Isaiah was in his vision.

And so where does that leave us? Hopefully confessing our sins just like Isaiah did! God is not interested in hearing about your work for him. If the works and deeds of the holy angels are not worth anything to him, how do you think your works will appear? God wants you to realize your smallness, your sins, your absolute need for his salvation. And why? Because unless you truly recognize your need for his salvation, you will never receive it in faith!

Thinking of our text, let me read again the call to confession we started our service with: "We have come into the presence of the holy God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy."

Trusting that God is indeed merciful, we simply pray: "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner!"

### Part Two: Leave with Him a saint

Isaiah recounts: *"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."*

At first glance what the angel did seems strange, until you understand what it symbolized. The altar was the place where sacrifices for sin were made. These sacrifices foreshadowed the once and for all sacrifice that Jesus would make for the sins of mankind on the cross.

By taking a coal from the altar, the angel was in effect telling Isaiah that God has forgiven all his sins and purified him from all unrighteousness. Why? Because of the promised sacrifice of Jesus.

And the angel touched his lips with the burning coal. This act showed that the LORD had purified his speech that Isaiah might serve as the LORD's spokesman.

The LORD promises that *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9) This is exactly what the LORD does every time we confess our sins to Him in worship. He sends his messengers - pastors - to touch our hearts with the cross, and say: "See, the blood of Christ your Savior covers you. Your sins have been atoned for. Be of good cheer: God has forgiven you!"

What a blessing! The almighty God has forgiven us for Christ's sake. This same Jesus, in whose majestic presence we stand, once stood in our place. He, the God from whom angels hide their faces, faced jeering, mocking, beating and crucifixion, all in order to save us. What love He has for us that He should forgive us; and forgiven we are! The cross and the empty tomb prove it.

Our text continues: *"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."*

Having received the Lord's forgiveness, Isaiah is as excited as a little child who is about to receive a special treat. I know this by observing my own family. There are times when Laura asks, "Who wants to help me clear the table, or unload the dishwasher. Our children answer: "I do, I do." Too bad that after the age of 6, children seem to lose this zeal for helping their parents in this way

But Isaiah didn't lose this zeal. The LORD asked if anyone wanted to help him, and Isaiah was like a little kid jumping up and down, saying "Pick me. Pick me!" And the LORD was happy to pick him.

What gave Isaiah such a desire to serve the LORD? It was his forgiveness! When He saw how the LORD simply forgave all his sins, and allowed him to be in his presence, it overwhelmed him. Isaiah was no longer afraid of God. He was confident of God's love. He wanted to thank God in any way he could, and the LORD gave him the opportunity.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you have been forgiven. Through faith, you are God's own dear child. And, just as He did for Isaiah, so the LORD calls out to you: "Whom shall I send to the community of Kewaunee? Who will go out and tell this community the good news about how I paid for their sins?"

And what is your response? Are you silent, saying in your heart: "Please Lord, send someone else?" Or do you, full of joy because of the relationship you have with Christ, say: "Here am I, Lord. Send me. Send me to my family and friends who don't know you. Send me to the people who are still burdened with the guilt of sin. Send and use me as your instrument to proclaim the Gospel to my beloved community."

But we often don't feel as enthusiastic as Isaiah, do we? Why is this? Often it is because we forget the great salvation Jesus won for us. But when we truly think about our sins, and how wonderfully God saved us, then we are reinvigorated to go out and share the Gospel.

And here is the cool part: I know that during this entire sermon I have been talking about coming into the presence of God during worship, but do you know what? Christians never really leave God's presence. No, God goes with them in love to guard and protect, nurture and guide them - as Jesus promised: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20). The same almighty LORD that was with Isaiah, is also with us.

Holy, holy holy, is the LORD God almighty. Come before him as a sinner. Leave with him as a dearly loved saint. Amen.