

First Sunday after Pentecost, Holy Trinity
May 31, 2015
Isaiah 6:1-8
Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty
Rev. George Ferch

Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

I tried to find a good picture of God to put in the bulletin. When I looked in the “clip art” all I found were some drawings of a gray haired grandpa, a stern looking king, and a creature with more than the standard two arms.

Everything I saw depicting God was a caricature. Sadly, those caricatures are what many people think of when they picture God in their minds. Of those three, God as gray haired grandpa who never says no and never disciplines is the most popular image.

On Trinity Sunday especially, we think about the essence and work of God; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One word, holy, stands out in our opening hymn and in our text. This single word erases all caricature and shows our eyes of faith the one true living God.

Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty. We behold God’s holiness in his essence. We behold God’s holiness in his works.

Isaiah’s account relates the call God extended to him to be God’s prophet. Isaiah was to call Israel to repentance for their idolatry and pronounce God’s certain judgment on those who would not repent. God’s call prepared Isaiah and enabled him to accept and to answer the one God in three person’s question, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” “Here am I. Send me!”

We look not so much to the one sent but more to the Sender. Yes, we want to be Isaiahs. We just confessed that in our familiar and loved mission hymn. Fields are ripe and harvests waiting. Multitudes are dying and there is something we can do; we can tell the love of Jesus, we can say Christ died for all. Our focus, however, is on God who calls us to both public and personal witness.

Isaiah’s vision included God’s attendant court of seraphim. These angels were above God; not greater than him, of course, but standing at his head ready to serve. Even as they covered themselves in the spirit of humility, they flew, ready to go and carry out his holy will and command.

The seraphim called to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty.” The continuous occupation of the seraphim is the blessed work of praising God. The triple holy may indicate the Trinity. In Hebrew repetition is for emphasis. We could paraphrase, holy - really holy - really, really, holy is the LORD Almighty. Holiness includes the entirety of God’s perfection that separates him from all creation.

God’s holiness is the total lack of sin and evil. It is God’s hatred of sin and evil. Earth is the theater in which we sit to view the fullness of God’s holiness and glory as it fills the entire universe. It fills creation not only in God’s presence that fills all things but in his actions. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” Psalm 19:1. This holiness is above and beyond all creation.

We behold God’s holiness in his essence. No one can look at God and live. No human can draw a picture of God not only because God is spirit without flesh and blood but because God’s essence is beyond capturing with paper and pen.

What a miracle that the true God has revealed himself to Isaiah in this vision. He reveals himself to us in Isaiah's record. Only God in his sacred revelation to pen and scroll can outline his essence for sinful man to behold.

It is no wonder Isaiah cried out in desperation when he saw God. "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Our response would be no different were we to stand in front of God dressed in the filthy rags of our unrighteousness. With Isaiah we would know that this was not a good thing and would know there was nothing we could do about it except perish in hell. Isaiah speaks not only about himself but about the entire nation of Israel. The prophet speaks about all of us.

How blessed we are that we behold God's holiness also in his works. God removed Isaiah's guilt and atoned for his sin in the person of Jesus Christ. The burning coal represents the cleansing fire that has burned away our impurities of sin and guilt.

Jesus' blood shed on the cross has removed our guilt and atoned for our sins. God's holiness that is his essence is not the holiness that saves us. It is God's holiness under the law through his perfect obedience that saves us. Redeeming holiness is the sacrifice God offered to God in full payment of the debt of eternal damnation we owed him.

God's holiness in Christ's service leads us to willing service. Our holiness and glory because of faith are the fullness of all things in the spreading of the gospel of redemption in Jesus Christ. We give glory to God for his works. Glory includes our life of faith in Jesus Christ and our lives we live to the glory of God. No longer is it "Woe to me."

We see God's holiness in all creation around us and even more in his declaring us holy through Christ and making our works holy through faith. In Christ's holiness we may stand in his presence without fear.

When the king calls us to shine Christ into the world, can we say anything except what God's forgiveness made Isaiah say, "Here am I. Send me." Amen. <SDG>