

"The Holy Trinity" Isaiah 6:1-7 Trinity Sunday 2022

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Isaiah, the mighty seer, saw the Lord enthroned upon His heavenly throne. Now, Isaiah was not mighty in himself. As he confessed in our reading, he was a man of unclean lips. Isaiah was weak and sinful, as we all are. But the vision that he received was mighty because he saw the All-powerful, glorious Lord. For the sake of the vision, the man is called mighty.

Before chapter six, Isaiah had been giving messages to the people to warn them of their sins and the consequences that were coming upon them. Their whole nation was in danger because of their iniquities. To highlight the seriousness of these proclamations, the Lord gave Isaiah the vision of the heavenly throne.

The people, however, were mostly jaded by a host of prophets and spiritualists who each came up with their own individual message. And of course, few thought that Isaiah was worth listening to. He was so grouchy, so judgmental, so full of gloom and doom. Others were more self-affirming, lifting the human spirit. It felt so much nicer to listen to those prophets.

This was where things stood in the kingdom of Judah. This is also pretty much where things stand in Canada. People love preachers that make them feel good. They love a message that says how noble and loving their human heart is. Few choose to hear a message that condemns the sin in each one of us. Few want to hear how corrupt we all have become, especially in this nation that tempts the Lord's wrath again and again. Very few preachers who preach the full sternness of the Law and the grace of Christ draw crowds of any size today.

A preacher today should still say, "Thus says the Lord . . ." when he preaches, but only because the message is drawn solely from the

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pages of Scripture. May we only be drawn to such messages. May we trust the authority of the Word, as Isaiah and the faithful few trusted the same Word delivered to them by the Lord God. So, what did God reveal and say to Isaiah?

In short, God is not a user-friendly Lord. He is not a friendly hugger who invites you to chat for a while. He is not the life coach of the self-help motivational speakers. He is not a god who makes your life smooth and easy. He is not your best bud in a familiar sort of way. No, He is the Lord God of hosts, Yahweh Sabaoth. He is the Ruler of the universe, the Almighty, the King far above us. He dwells in thick smoke in Isaiah's vision because He cannot be seen by the sinful eyes of men. Even this hazy sight made Isaiah rightly fearful for his life. Our uncleanness cannot stand in the presence of the holy and glorious God. This is not a comforting vision of how God is a loving, affirming pal.

In the vision, even God's nature defies explanation. We hear the seraphim say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." Sometimes, repetition is a matter of emphasis. Yet we know that in the one Godhead there is a "threeness". The Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, and the Spirit is almighty, yet there are not three, but one Almighty. There is one God, yet He is hailed as the Holy One three times by the angels. He is both three and one at the same time, which is a contradiction to our limited human minds, yet it is the truth of Him who is infinitely more complex and majestic than we can comprehend.

We are also, like Isaiah, people of unclean lips, and we live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. But the lips are only the outward organ for the heart. The lips are unclean because the heart is unclean. It bubbles and boils and sends out sins that can be seen and heard. But even if we could somehow, impossibly, clean up our lips and actions,

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the sin that lurks in our hearts is a deep and terrible stain that no effort of ours can erase.

“Woe is me! For I am undone!” says Isaiah. Death and destruction threaten us. The thrice-holy God cannot tolerate sin, for He is a God of justice. And we are sinners indeed. Yet the King is also merciful. He shows grace to the lowly and meek. As Isaiah trembles in fear, the Lord sends an angel to give forgiveness. A glowing coal from the altar touches Isaiah’s lips, and the messenger of God declares, “Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged.”

How can a coal do such great things? It is not just the coal, but the coal combined with the Word of God. In the same way, we are splashed with water, and a word of God is spoken. Through this washing, the thrice-holy name of God is placed upon us, and we are accepted by Him. The water alone does not do it, but the water with the Word. In the same way, bread and wine are eaten and drunk, and with them, we eat and drink the Body and Blood of the holy Son of God for forgiveness and life. Bread and wine alone do not have this power, but the bread and wine along with the Word with which Christ instituted His Supper.

The fact that He is the thrice-holy Lord is a very good thing for our salvation. The Holy Father showed His grace to lowly sinners by sending the holy Son into human flesh. That holy Son willingly obeyed the Law on earth. He was the only Man of clean lips, even though He was surrounded by men of unclean lips. He kept Himself clean, inside, and out, with a heart immaculately pure. For He is not only Man, but also the true and holy God.

Then, obedient to His Father’s command, the holy Son submitted to death, even the death of the Cross. The holy God in human flesh

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took responsibility for all our unholiness. The Son was afflicted with the fiery wrath of God against sin. The Son allowed the destruction and death we deserved to fall upon Him. Because of this, our sins are atoned for, that is, they are covered up by the Blood of Christ. The Father does not see our unholiness, because the holiness of Christ is our clothing.

Shall we then take this atonement for granted? Shall we act as if it does not matter what we do when such a great price has been paid? If God Himself had to come down from His throne into our flesh to pay the awful price, shall we treat sin as if it were nothing? Heaven forbid!

For even when all was accomplished by the holy Son, we still could not trust in His sacrifice. Our sinful hearts still were so unclean that they could not have faith. So, the Holy Spirit came forth, eternally proceeding from the Father and Son, so that we could receive the gift of faith.

And this Holy Spirit also remains with us, to guard our lips and work in our hearts, so that our lives may be renewed in the new life that He has poured out upon us.

Now our lips are declared holy by the holy God. So, we can join with the angels in declaring the glories of God. We greet His coming in His sacred meal with the words Isaiah heard: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory."

Yet we never forget how unworthy we are. As we remember our sins, we might wish for a pair of wings to cover our faces from the holy God. But He has given us something far better. He has set His grace among us in His house. So let us flee often to God's Throne of grace, where He gives out the benefits of Christ's death. Let us kneel in

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reverence before the incomprehensible, holy God. For we do not kneel before a terrible tyrant, but before a gracious God.

And soon enough we will bow down before Him, face to face, in the place where we will stand beside angels and saints and prophets, to praise the thrice-holy God forever.

In His Name, the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.