

## 5th Sunday after Epiphany

Grace, mercy and peace are yours because the One and Only Holy God and Judge over all Creation, has accepted the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the atonement of our sins!

*NIV Isaiah 6: 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

Introduction: "Are you a real man?" What makes a real man? Let's ask the ladies. Well, a polling firm asked women from US, Canada, and Mexico and found these 6 general traits to define a "real man": "Be financially independent; Be physically healthy; Be a loving father; Be intelligent; Be dependable; Have a strong character." I don't know about you, but I don't think I meet the minimum requirements. Should we just lower our standards? Should people just expect less from us? Should we just accept the unacceptable? It is because of the low estimation of many of us and the toleration we all show for sin that when someone needs help or work in God's Family – I don't here many of us shouting with Isaiah, "Here I am. Send me!" We are far too worried about being found out, falling on our face and failing as a real man. In our text for today the Lord prepares Isaiah to be a real man for his Kingdom! A man filled with independence, inner strength, a strong character, intelligence, love and dependability, faithfulness! Walk with Isaiah into God's Temple and become a real man: - See the height of God's holiness, feel the fear of being found out and receive the exhilarating power of Atonement from your King and Savior, Jesus Christ.

### **"Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6:1-8**

**Part 1: (v1-4) The Height of Holiness of the Lord**

**Part 2: (v5) The Fear of Being Found**

**Part 3: (v6-7) The Exhilarating Power of Atonement**

Part 1: (v1-4) The Height of Holiness of the Lord

*1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

In order to prepare Isaiah to be God's spokesmen to his people, the Lord gave him a vision. This is not a snapshot of God's Throne room, identical to the real deal in paradise. Instead this is a revelation or vision given to Isaiah much like John's revelation. It is a picture given to him to teach and instill in him timeless truths about God, himself and his relationship with the eternal God.

Isaiah sees with his eyes, the Lord. The Lord in his mercy and compassion put this vision together for the sake of Isaiah. The lord is invisible in reality and does not have a body that could wear a robe. Yet the Lord takes on this form for the sake of Isaiah to understand the height of Holiness of God. The robe the Lord was wearing was so massive that there was no room for anyone in the temple to stand! And like VIPs today they all have their entourage of servants, assistants and bodyguards; the Lord lets Isaiah see his attendants, servants, for he needs no bodyguards. The seraphim are angels of fire with 3 sets of wings. As they float above the Lord awaiting his commands, they are covering their faces with one set of wings and with another set they are covering their feet. These perfect, pure and powerful beings know their place in his grand scheme of things. They are servants of God and show their humility. They can not look at the Lord directly or risk irreverence. As they hovered above the throne, awaiting the Lord's commands, they chanted back and forth the height of Holiness of God, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Saying it once didn't do it justice they had to sing

it three times in a row for emphasis. Could it possibly be the three in one God they hint at? In any case Holiness defines who the Lord is. Holiness means separate, independent in a class by itself. There is nothing like the Lord. He needs nothing. He needs no one. He is the one true Prime mover and self sufficient into eternity. No one tells him what to do. He passes judgments over all people over all things! Look around at this created world from the ground. We see proof of His holiness. Who knows when an earthquake will hit? They still have no idea how to predict their occurrences. The Lord knows, and the Lord plans accordingly. Look at

the heavens above that declare the holiness of God. Who knows why it rains, or when it will rain, or why the clouds will be shut? No one! No one except the Holy God! Adding to the whole scene Isaiah tells us that the entire place was shaking because of the loud song of the seraphim. And the entire Throne room was covered in smoke.

What a tremendous impression this scene left on Isaiah! I counted 26 times where he uses the designation, "The Holy one of Israel" as the name of the Lord. Wherever we turn our eyes or turn our thoughts the majesty, the glory, the independence and the authority of God are there before us. You and I have no right to question him, no right to second guess him, no right to turn to our own way, no right to demand anything from him, no right to disobey him. The height of God's holiness is infinitely and eternally above his creatures, you and me.

## Part 2: (v5) The Fear of Being Found

*5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "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."*

The effect of the height of God's holiness in this scene was tremendous on Isaiah. He was filled with fear. He knew that he was far below God's holiness and even far below the holiness of the seraphim. He knew that he was filled with sin, and that sin showed itself on his lips when he spoke. I can see him glancing around looking for a way out. And when that was not available, I see his eyes darting back and forth looking for a place to hide for cover from the holiness and glory of the Lord. Yet there was no cover for even the robe of God filled the temple along with the countless seraphim. Isaiah realized that before the holy One there is no escape. There is only a fearful expectation of judgment and death. All he can muster to say is, "It's over." David put it this way:

*NIV Psalm 24:1 Of David. A psalm. The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; 2 for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. 3 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,*

Isaiah and King David knew the reason why they couldn't stand before the Holy Judge: "I am a man." In fact Isaiah even says that he lives among a nation of men and women who are unclean, unclean lips and hearts. We are men like Isaiah with unclean hearts. Wait, pastor, you can't judge my heart! How do you know? I see your unclean heart by what pours out of your unclean lips and what you do with your unclean hands. You rob from God the glory due to him. You speak his name with disrespect. You despise his presence and His word. You sooner lift up your hands for money that to serve the Lord's wishes. And when the Lord's name is disrespected, then your lips are shut. When the Lord asks you to speak of His law and gospel, then you close your lips. When the Lord asks you to bring the little children to him or bring them up in the instruction of the Lord, then your lips are closed, your hands do nothing and you kick up your feet to rest.

Like Isaiah we must say, "It's over." We are doomed. We cannot survive in the presence of God let alone serve him and carry out his commands. Like Adam and Eve in the garden we look to find cover. We hide and lie to each other so that we appear to be good. But there is no hiding and no cover from the judgment of the Holy God, the Lord Almighty. Stop hiding! Stop running for cover when there is none to be found! We understand that a real man knows his own weaknesses. Stop pretending. Stop lying to yourself. Stop hiding from the Lord. With Isaiah simply say, "It's over." For then the Lord will send his messengers to you with great news -

## Part 3: (v6-7) The Exhilarating Power of Atonement

*6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."*

What great mercy and compassion the Lord shows to Isaiah by not just saying, "Your sins are forgiven", but actually sending His messenger with a live coal from the altar and touching his lips, and then telling him what it symbolizes. "Your guilt is taken away. Your sin atoned for." There was no way Isaiah could stand before the Lord with his sins, his impure heart and unclean lips. Sin separates us from God and puts us on the receiving end of His wrath and judgment – eternal punishment in hell. Our sins must be turned away. They must be removed. God our heavenly father sacrificed his Son on the cross to take away our sins, remove them

from the equation. By Jesus' death on the cross, our sins have been removed. His sacrifice paid and removed the stain of sin from our hearts and lips. What tremendous symbolism that from the altar where the sacrifices were made the live coal purifies Isaiah from all his sin.

Remember the great fear Isaiah had in being found by the Lord and punished for his sinfulness? Well, Isaiah was given a place of cover. He could cover himself with the atonement. Jesus Christ not only died to remove the stain of sin, but he also lived a holy life. Jesus Christ was holy in his thoughts, words and actions. He obeyed God every step of the way. It is that holy life that now covered Isaiah's sinfulness. He found a place of cover – the atonement of Jesus Christ. You and I have that same place of cover, a place to hide, a place to escape the judgment of God and receive holiness. It is the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice for our sins that removed the stain of sin and gives us a safe cover in the presence of the Holy God and Judge. We hear it in his Word, we touch it to our lips in the Lord's Supper! I think of all those commercials for exhilarating mints or gum. The person chewing or eating the mint or gum is just revived, refreshed, filled with energy and joy! Our sins have been atoned for. We have been purified! We have a place of cover in the very presence of the Holy God and Judge! We will not be burned up by His Holiness. We are his servant. We are his children.

The apostle Peter knew what it was like to be in the presence of the Lord Almighty. He was there on Transfiguration mountain and saw the glory of the Lord. He also knew what it meant to be in the presence of God with your sins separating you from him when he betrayed Jesus at his trial. Like Isaiah, Peter also knew what it felt like to receive cover, atonement for sins when he was forgiven by Jesus and reinstated as a great apostle for the Lord. He writes in his letter how exhilarating he felt from forgiveness to serve the Lord with his life:

*NIV 1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Peter was a real man not because he was an apostle or a fisherman but because he knew his sins were covered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He now knew because of that atonement who he was and what God had given to him! Talk about a strong character and confidence! We are real men, real men of Jesus! We know who we are: forgiven, purified and covered with the blood of Jesus Christ. We are confident of our calling to be God's men, to serve him, to follow him, to honor him with our life!

The first time I was going to meet Heidi's parents I was quite nervous, because I wanted them to like me. Afterwards my father-in-law told me his secret with all his daughter's suitors. If they looked him in the eye when they talked, he knew they could be a possible match. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are real men, with confidence to look our Holy God in the eye, to stop hiding and to stand up with all of God's men and say, "Here I am. Send me! Send me!"