

"Whom Shall I Send?"
Sunday, January 21, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out 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 trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. 5 Then I said,

*"Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among 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 with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

8 Then 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!"

-Isaiah 6:1-8

Uzziah (also known as Azariah) served as king of Judah, southern Palestine, from 792-740 BC. His father was assassinated and Uzziah went against his father's enemies and was victorious against the Edomites, Philistines, Arabians, and Meunites. One can read about these victories in 2 Kings 14 and 2 Chronicles 26. Uzziah modernized the military, rebuilt Jerusalem's walls in a way that made them easier to defend, rebuilt the port town of Elath, built towers and wells to increase the land's agricultural yield, and was considered a godly and powerful King.

But then...we read in 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 - *"But when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to make offering on the altar of incense. But the priest Azariah went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor; they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to make offering to the Lord, but for the priests the descendants of Aaron, who are consecrated to make offering. Go out of the*

sanctuary; for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God.” Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to make offering, and when he became angry with the priests a leprous disease broke out on his forehead, in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord, by the altar of incense. When the chief priest Azariah, and all the priests, looked at him, he was leprous in his forehead. They hurried him out, and he himself hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him. King Uzziah was leprous to the day of his death...”

After being struck with leprosy, Uzziah had to abdicate in favor of his son Jothan, who became the acting ruler of Judah.

V. 1 - *"In the year of King Uzziah's death..."*

Isaiah prophesied to Judah, in the many years to follow Uzziah's death, about the moral depravity, political corruption, social injustice, and spiritual idolatry God was seeing. Isaiah cried out, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned away, every one, to his own way..."* (Isaiah 53:6). Because the nation of Judah would not turn away from these sinful practices, Isaiah announced God's approaching judgment. Nevertheless, God would remain faithful to His promise to Abraham long ago and preserve a Godly remnant. Furthermore, the Savior would come out of Judah.

Following Uzziah's death, Isaiah went forth, preaching words of both judgment and redemption, being ignored and mistreated throughout his ministry...Isaiah continued to preach, continued to go, regardless of the response he got, because God called him...

V. 1-4 - *"In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out 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 trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke."*

Isaiah is transported in a vision to God's throne...he sees Angels attending God...voices echoing throughout the cavernous sanctuary "Holy, Holy, Holy"...I am sure he could sense in his joints the shaking foundations and smell the smoke upon the altar...

Isaiah comes face to face with a Holy and Just God...

And there is only one response possible... Isaiah immediately feels his unworthiness, his sin. How can he stand before a holy and perfect and magnificent God?

Isaiah cries out...V 5 - *"Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'"*

It is only after receiving a clean heart, only after the seraphim flew down to Isaiah with a burning coal and touched his lips, removing his guilt, burning away his sin, offering forgiveness and grace, that Isaiah could hear God's call on his life and answer that yes, he would go.

V. 6-8 - *"Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.'"*

After the seraphim (translates "fiery ones"/serve as guardians of the divine throne and emissaries of divine judgment)...after the seraphim fly down...burning Isaiah's iniquity and sin away...Isaiah's ears, and especially his heart, are open to hear God speak...and Isaiah is able to respond...

V. 8 - *"Then 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'"*

There is no way to know God without being changed.

Isaiah is changed and he hears God speak and goes forth to serve Him.

Look at the steps in Isaiah's call...

First, Isaiah becomes aware of the mysteriousness, the holiness, of God.

Richard D. Phillips writes, *"Sometimes people say to me, 'Pastor, why should I go to church?' There are many good reasons to go to church. We might say, 'You'll benefit from the fellowship we've got nice people here. You might meet a nice girl here, or a nice boy here. There are big business contracts here. You'll enjoy the music. Maybe the preaching will be interesting.' Some of this is true to one extent or another, but the reason for us to gather with excitement and to prepare for worship, to set aside time, to come together as the people of God is because God is holy. He is holy, exalted, transcendent God, and he demands and deserves our worship."*

The angels sing - V. 3 - *"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."*

Perhaps we sometimes forget the holiness of God...we fail to keep God's holiness...His glory...front-and-center. Can we imagine standing before God? How might you approach prayer at a meeting, opening God's Word, worshipping on Sunday mornings if you truly understood God is present and that God is Holy? Would you worry as much about your schedules, the type of music, if we were going to get out on time, if the service spoke to you, if you understood that when you worship with other believers you come before the Holiness of God? Would you kneel at the altar more, sing more loudly and boldly...would you shake in His presence...would you walk across the aisle at church and ask forgiveness from someone you were at odds with before worship started? Would you fail to be able to even look on God because of your sin? Would you cry out for forgiveness?

Isaiah immediately recognizes his sin when he finds himself standing before the holiness of God...

V. 5 - *"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."*

Therefore, first, we must recognize the holiness, the glory of God...we must come before Him in all his magnificence...

Secondly, in God's presence...God will convict us of our sin...and it is then we must cry out to God...confess and repent...seek forgiveness for the things we have done and those we have failed to do...

If we want to experience revival, if we want to experience and hear God's call on our lives, we must first repent. In the United Methodist Church we have a prayer of "*Confession and Pardon*" as part of our communion liturgy. It reads,

***Merciful God,
we confess that we have not
loved you with our whole heart.
We have failed to be an obedient church.
We have not done your will,
we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.
Forgive us, we pray.
Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

What might happen if everyone in our congregation prayed such a prayer daily? If everyone in our nation prayed such a prayer daily? If we truly met it, crying out to God to forgive us for our stupidity, our selfishness, our mess-ups? What might we hear? What might we see? How might God show up?

First, we must come into the presence of God's holiness. Secondly, we must allow God to convict us of our sin and repent. Thirdly, we must accept God's forgiveness, His grace.

V. 6-7 - "*Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth*

with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

Remember, there is no way to know God without being changed.

Lastly, we must listen. We must turn off all the outside noise and listen. And we must surrender to God's direction. Hear God's call on our lives and respond.

V. 8 - "Then 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!'"

And Isaiah's call shows us that often God's call on our lives can lead us into a mess of trouble...it is often not a call to a "*settled*" ministry...Isaiah had to go out and preach to a faithless Israel until, God says, the "*land is utterly desolate.*"

God's call on our lives has led Deb and I to sell our home, move our family five times in the last twenty years, leaving every friend, every person we knew, and starting over...there has been heartache, attacks against our family, many who would not listen to what God had placed on our hearts to share...many times we have wanted to quit but in those moments we remember that it is not a choice, it is not a job...it is a calling...

We had come before the holiness of God, studying the Bible together in Disciple, worshipping, serving, teaching Sunday school...we were convicted of our sin and fell before God recognizing our sin, the pain we had caused others, the times we had turned from God...we cried out for forgiveness and we experienced His forgiveness ten-fold...our hearts cleansed we listened...we heard God calling..."*Whom shall I send?*"...and we answered, "*Here we are, Lord...Send us!*" We could not say, "No" after coming into God's presence, getting to know Him. "No, Lord" is a contradiction in terms. If we say, "No" to God than He is not our "Lord," we have not recognized His holiness, His magnificence, that He IS to be honored.

And in honoring God's call on our lives...even with the heartaches of ministry...we have been so blessed...we have come to know God more intimately...we have become stronger...we have had countless people

come into our lives, many whom we have come to love deeply...Unlike Isaiah, we have been cared for, watched over by the congregations where God sent us to speak His vision...and many people have heard, have listened as we have shared God's Word, His vision, laid upon our hearts...

God has a call on each of our lives. We were created for a purpose. God is ready to use us, to send us, to work through us...through each of you...using the special gifts he has blessed each of you with...God has placed you in this body, this church, in order to achieve His mission. But we must hear what He has to say to us. We must hear the call on our lives, the direction we must go. We cannot hear this unless we

- (1) come into His presence...stand before His holiness...worship Him;
- (2) when we come before the holiness of God we will be convicted of our sin...it is then we must repent, cry out for forgiveness;
- (3) accept God's forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ...receive a clean heart; and
- (4) listen, hear God's call on your life...hear God ask, "Whom shall I send" to do this thing...to start this ministry...to go on this mission trip...to serve in the community...to give to this ministry...to raise up my church...hear God call and respond...

Respond immediately...respond with faith and trust in the One in which "*the foundations of the thresholds tremble at [His] voice...*"...whose "*train of His robe [fills] the temple.*"