

## **Isaiah 6:1-8**

### **Holiest of holies**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.

When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord, his description of the event is almost beyond our comprehension and may even seem a bit frightening. Being in the throne room of God with the six-winged seraphim praising God, and then the temple filling with smoke is not something for the fainthearted. When confronted with almighty God, creator of the universe, king above all kings, the prophet's reaction is quite understandable. "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." Coming into the direct presence of the Lord is not something to seek and is actually rather terrifying. The Lord is God. The prophet Isaiah is not. The Lord is holy and righteous in every way. The prophet Isaiah is not, and the people of Israel are not, and we are not.

The seraphim gathered around the throne proclaim a three-fold 'holy'. A strong emphasis that the Lord God almighty is completely set apart from his creation. There is nothing else like God. Nothing can compare. In Hebrew, repetition is how you express a superlative. In English, we would talk about something being the biggest or tallest, but in Hebrew, you just repeat the word. So 'big big' or 'tall tall'. To add a third makes it unsurpassable. The seraphs proclaim that God is completely, totally, absolutely, the holiest of the holy. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty."

Holiness is essential to the very nature of God, and God himself is the definition of what it means to be holy. And God's absolute holiness reveals how separate and different he is in comparison to all other aspects of this created world. This also means God is separate from everything that is sinful or unclean in this world. Isaiah, in stark contrast, sees himself as a moral leper. He says he is a man of unclean lips from a people of unclean lips. Meaning, he is riddled with sin and can have nothing to do with this holy God.

But God made a way. Through one of the seraphs, God purified Isaiah's lips with fire, a live coal. "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Isaiah could now remain in the presence of a holy God. But it's not being in God's presence in the heavenly throne room that is of concern. The seraphim proclaimed, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." The whole earth. Not just the heavens. Not just a few specific places. The whole earth is full of the glory of God.

God is almighty and holy and above all things. And at the same time, God is here, present, filling his creation with his own holy presence. So, Isaiah's striking encounter with the very presence of the Lord reveals that he was never outside of the Lord's presence. Even as a man of unclean lips from a people of unclean lips, he still lived in God's creation. But God hides his presence. And this is an act of mercy. God is present throughout his creation, but in a hidden way that does not immediately strike down everything that is sinful or unclean. God even took on human flesh, being born into this world as the man Jesus Christ, to give himself to his people in a way that hides his holiness and his glory. And God makes other ways for us to gather as his people in his presence.

We certainly don't come into the presence of almighty God under our own righteousness or holiness, because it's not enough, not even close. But we do gather as God's people who have been born of water and the spirit, as we heard in the Gospel of John. We are God's children who are led by God's spirit. We have been baptised into the Triune name and can call on God as Father as co-heirs with Christ. We gathered today in the Triune name, reminding ourselves of why and how we can enter the presence of a holy God. Just like Isaiah, we have been purified. Not with fire but through the waters of baptism. Baptised into the Triune name – Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.

We don't need to look at the world around us and wonder about who God is. We don't have to purify ourselves to enter God's presence. We are not left in the dark about who we are and whose we are. God has revealed himself to us in ways we can comprehend, even if the fullness of divinity is beyond our comprehension. God has placed upon us his triune name, even though we cannot hope to explain how God is three in one. Our Lord comes to us to renew us and forgive us through a simple meal of bread and wine. All of who God is is given to us in that meal. We receive forgiveness and life eternal. We receive God, but hidden in bread and wine. Given in such a way that the holiest of holies can come among a people who are sinful.

Just like Isaiah, I can certainly say, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips". And I can thank God that he has made a way for me and for you. Through his word, through his sacraments, God allows us into his holy presence, though we are very undeserving. The least we can do in return is to thank and praise his holy name. To join in the song of the seraphim in proclaiming "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty." And to turn to those things that God has given us to purify us and make us fit for eternity in his presence.

We can rejoice in our baptisms, knowing that he calls us his own. We can read and hear his word, knowing that God's will is made known. We can gather at the Lord's table, to receive the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, to receive Christ's own holiness and righteousness unto life eternal. God is holy and righteousness and almighty and Lord above all things, but we can come to him through the means that he has provided, and he is worthy of our praise both now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.