

Pastor Luke C. Werre

May 30, 2021

Sermon Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

What an awesome display Isaiah witnessed, as rank after rank of angels each in succession raised their voices in a litany of praise to the Most High King! One day, not only will believers personally observe the grandeur of such worship but we will participate in it. Right now we hear the faintest echo of that angelic liturgy in our Communion service: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.” Perhaps contemplating this reading from Isaiah chapter 6 will enhance our appreciation of what’s being sung in the liturgy – like it’s an earthly extension of what’s taking place in the Grand Beyond, but more importantly, may these few minutes together enhance our anticipation of one day joining that heavenly experience.

Described for us in Isaiah chapter 6 is a miraculous vision that Isaiah received at the beginning of his ministry. In fact, by this vision God was commissioning Isaiah to preach and write. Central to the vision are the angels words, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Armies!”

The Hebrew language in which Isaiah wrote is onomatopoeic. That means words sound like the thing they describe. A bee buzzes. A steak sizzles. When the angels in Isaiah’s vision echoed back and forth, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty,” the Hebrew word they used for holy is *kadosh*. We have a similar word in English: *kaboom!* Have you ever felt the ground shake, or your chest thud from the thunder of a lightning storm? Yet even that is nothing compared to the majestic thunder of God’s heavenly military forces rallying around the throne of the Almighty. We are told that the resonance of their voices made the doorposts and thresholds of the temple shake. *Kadosh* –holy, is the Lord, Almighty!

It made a deep impression on Isaiah’s heart and mind. Isaiah was to know this first and foremost before he entered the public ministry: God is holy. We dare never forget it either. Not only our worship, but our entire relationship with God centers on this fact: God is holy.

The angels defined God’s holiness when they sang, “*The whole earth is full of His glory.*” The word “glory” in its most basic form means weightiness –like when you say, “That’s a weighty argument.” In other words, God’s will, God’s words are heavy. What

he imposes or demands cannot be stopped. Pressure from God cannot be relieved. God's holiness presses down and breaks and crushes all who are not holy.

We all feel pressures in life. Pressure from exam week. Pressure to perform at work. Pressures at home. Pressure from anyone who has expectations of us. Rarely, do we stop to consider that all pressure ultimately comes from God. God has created and designed this world and this life to operate under a set of standards. He has imposed His standards on all people. Those standards work their way through and permeate every aspect of life. His standards are heavy. There is no relief from them. His expectation is perfection to His standards. Yes, there are people who may sinfully place wrong expectations on us. Sometimes, we mistakenly place wrong expectations on ourselves. But even without those things, we never measure up to God's standards. Many people despair about life because of all their failings. Maybe they don't even realize it is God's holiness causing them to despair. They just know they are not measuring up.

And there is no "out" for us. Even if we were, as some say, basically good –to tolerate basically good people God would have to stop being God. He would have to deny Himself. Basically good isn't holy. It may not seem fair. But what seems right and fair to you and me is irrelevant. God is God and God is holy. The whole earth is filled with His glory. That means that God's expectation of perfection falls on everyone - no person excepted. Anyone who does not measure up to God's standard of perfection cannot coexist with Him in heaven. Anyone who does not measure up to God's standard of perfection will experience the weight of God's judgment resulting in the punishment of hell.

*Kadosh!* That clap of thunder strikes fear. God's holiness makes Him about as friendly to us as a lightning bolt would be to a raw piece of bacon.

If you were on a golf course when a thunderstorm rumbled in, you would probably head for cover. On the day Jesus returns to judge the world, bright as a flash of lightning, you'll want to run for cover too...

...unless, instead of running *from* His holiness, you want to run *to* His holiness for shelter now. Yes, contrary to our first instinct, God has made it that His holiness is actually our rescue. For it is His holiness that sets us free from His own judgment. The very holiness He demands of us according to His own standards He also provides us as a gift.

This salvation-giving truth is why Trinity Sunday is so important, to be reminded that the only true God is the Triune God. You see, it was God the Son of the Triune God who

took on skin and bones and became fully human. It was God the Son while He was here on earth who lived up to the Father's standard of holiness. Now God gives to us the credit for what Jesus did through faith, meaning as we trust in Him. He did the work. He put in the sweat. We get the credit, the impact, the weightiness ...the glory of what Jesus did.

In addition God put the weight of blame for all our failings on Jesus and then struck Jesus with His thundering judgment when Jesus was crucified. Jesus received the damning *kadosh* of God's holiness as He hung on the cross.

The point of Jesus' death is that He served as our substitute. God declared Jesus guilty and in turn He declares you and me forgiven, innocent, free from His condemnation. Think of the irony! The divine, beautiful, life-saving, heaven-opening, God-blessed irony! God, who is holy and will not tolerate anything unholy, has provided us unholy people the very holiness He demands. The very holiness of God that frightens us like a clap of thunder is actually our shelter from His threat to judge. We can appeal to God and say, "You must not condemn me. You must accept me. You must save and help me and bless me. Not because I am holy, but because your Son Jesus was holy for me. And His holiness carries weight with you, dear God." Christ's holiness is solid like fortress. You can't poke any holes in it. Relying on Jesus, we have God as our loving Father.

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

As a prophet or preacher Isaiah hones in on his lips. If any of us tried to count the number of unclean words that have passed our lips – thoughtless, harsh, untrue, arrogant, or words with ulterior motives – the number would be infinite. But then an angel – a seraph – touches Isaiah's mouth with a live coal – a live coal – something that you'd think would hurt him – but it does just the opposite – it purifies him, it saves him – it puts him in good standing with God. That's like God's holiness – the very thing that should destroy us, heals us and becomes our salvation. For God's holiness and glory are given to us in the person of Christ. And Christ is given to us through God's Word and Sacraments.

Three times holy, three times *kadosh* thundered from the angels. God the Father created you and me to be holy. Though our holiness has been lost by sin, God the Son came to

restore it by His life, death and resurrection. God the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, that means He makes us holy, by creating in us faith in Jesus to receive His holiness.

Three times holy, three times *kadosh* thundered from the angels. For God's holiness given to us in Jesus strikes down all fear of our three main enemies: sin, death and the devil.

Three times holy, three times *kadosh* thundered from the angels. For the holiness of the Triune God in connection with Jesus Christ is our salvation.