

053021      Isaiah 6:1-8    Holy Trinity  
“The Real Human Condition”

One of the most incredible, mind-blowing passages in all the Bible, to me, is right here in Isaiah 6. The prophet tells how he was privileged to actually see God, sitting on his heavenly throne, with his own eyes.

My Bible has a little title over this section, “Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord.” But I wish that title said a little more. I wish it read, “Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord and Us.” You see, Isaiah doesn’t just give us a picture of God here. Isaiah is really giving us a picture of us. Isaiah makes it crystal clear what our human condition really is, in relation to our amazing God.

The prophet looks up at God sitting on that throne – God in all his glory, God spectacular in power and majesty. And all Isaiah can do – his one response, and the one and only response that any human being could appropriately have before God -- is to throw himself on God’s mercy. Standing in the presence of God, all Isaiah can do is fall down on his face, give up any pretense of worthiness, let go of any pride or arrogance, and throw himself on the mercy of God.

“Woe is me,” Isaiah says, “For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” Isaiah is convinced he’s a dead man, because he has seen God, and he is so, so unworthy.

Can you picture this scene? Isaiah cringing there, shuddering, utterly humble, fully aware of just how insignificant, just how unclean, he really is, compared to the King, the Lord of hosts. That picture – helpless, hopeless Isaiah on his knees – that is a picture of the true human condition.

We're all that weak, before God. Coming today into the temple of our holy, perfect Lord, we're all just as unclean and lost as Isaiah. All we can do, as imperfect sinners, is to throw ourselves, with Isaiah, on the mercy of God. That's the real human condition. That's the one and only response we should have, when it comes to standing in the presence of God.

And, yet, we humans don't really like that picture. We don't like admitting to such weakness, to be so vulnerable. We like to pretend that we're not that bad.

"My human condition?" we try to reason, "Well, it's certainly not perfect. But I'm way better than most people I know. I'm living a pretty decent life. I'm only hanging on to a few of my personal sinful habits. And I'm just deciding for myself on a couple of big moral issues, instead of yielding to what God's Word says. I'll give God respect and worship, but I get to decide how much."

Instead of just falling down on our face in utter humility, don't we try to dictate how it really works between us and our transcendent, almighty Maker? As if we really have the final say, when it comes to God? The real human condition? Isaiah nailed it. "Woe is me!" he said, "For I am lost."

All we can really do is to fall down at God's feet, to humbly throw ourselves on his mercy. That's a true, clear picture of my human condition, and yours.

And it's only there – when we're on our knees, when we've given up trying to be self-sufficient – it's only there, in the spiritual posture of Isaiah, where we get the truest, clearest picture of our God. It's only when we see ourselves in the real human condition that we can begin to see what our mighty, mysterious God can do with us.

What does God do to Isaiah? In Isaiah 6, God cleanses him, and he commissions him.

First, he sends an angel to touch the prophet's mouth with a burning coal. He says to him, "Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." Isaiah doesn't cleanse himself. This is God's work.

This is always God's work. We can't take away our own guilt, or atone for our own sin. Only God's grace does it. We don't see an angel flying at us with a burning coal. But, even better, we see the Son of God dying on the cross to pay for all our sins. When we throw ourselves on God's mercy – when we acknowledge that we aren't good enough and can't be good enough – we receive all we need from God. We are saved by God's grace, through faith in Christ. With Isaiah, cleansed.

And, with Isaiah, commissioned. God doesn't leave Isaiah cringing on the floor. God speaks from his throne. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us (*a little reference to the triune plurality of God*)?" He's chosen this man, Isaiah. A lost man; an unclean, helpless man. But that's all God needs. He doesn't need our expertise or credentials. God only needs a soul willing to be a tool in God's hand. So Isaiah, having thrown himself on the mercy of God, having been cleansed by the grace of God, humbly offers, "Here am I! Send me."

And God sends him. He gives Isaiah an important ministry. Isaiah becomes a powerful prophet, a towering figure in the annals of God's chosen people; but he's really only that humble soul willing to be a tool in God's hand.

And that's all God needs for you and me to be, too. Throw yourself on the mercy of God. Be cleansed by God's grace

for you in Christ. And then, humbly, without preconditions, without worrying about whether you're good enough or strong enough, let God use you. Whatever he asks you to do, do it; and he'll make it work. However the Word of God and his Spirit may move you to act and speak this week toward your neighbors, toward your coworkers and classmates, let it happen, don't get in the way; and God will make it bear fruit.

You don't have to be a prophet, or a missionary, or a vicar. You and I are called to do God's work, to serve his people, to spread his love in little, simple ways every day. Welcome someone who's new to our church today. Invite a neighbor to come to church next week. Join a ministry team here at Hope. Love your neighbors. Share some time with someone who's sick, or lonely, or grieving. Forgive someone who's wronged you.

God cleanses you, and God commissions you! You and I don't get to hear God's voice, booming from the throne, calling us personally to do his work. But we do get to hear the very words of Christ, commissioning his disciples. We pick up our Bibles, and God tells us how he wants us to live, to serve, to give witness, to represent him in this world. You don't need special skills, training, or equipment. Just be willing, with Isaiah, to be a tool in the hand of God this week.

Throw yourself on the mercy of God. Humbly receive his cleansing. Then say, with Isaiah, to the God who commissions you, "Here am I. Send me." Amen.