

May 31, 2015

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church  
“Before The Throne Of God”

Have you ever had a front-row seat at a sporting event, a concert, or a sports event? Let’s look at a few pictures that came in ...

Now, I notice every week that the front row, here in church, is usually the last row to be taken. There are some exceptions, but most of you just don’t want to be that close, don’t want to be in the line of fire, right?

But what if your seat every Sunday was not back there, but right up here? (*by rail*) What is you had to sit right here every week? (*in front of pulpit*) Would you sign up for that? Or would you run away screaming?

We heard in our Bible lesson for today about a man who had a front-row seat, a super-close encounter, with God. This man, Isaiah, was granted a vision. He had the awesome privilege to see the throne room of God in heaven. Isaiah didn’t get a back-row seat, or a balcony seat. He was close. He was up front. Isaiah was right there before the throne of God. There were angels. There was smoke. And the whole building shook at the voice of the angel, who said, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

Here’s God, sitting on his God-throne – almighty, all-knowing, holy and perfect God. And here’s Isaiah, this close, feeling like a worm, feeling unworthy, feeling like he doesn’t belong. “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; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Can you relate to that? Wouldn’t you feel the same fear? If you were in God’s throne room, in the front row, right in front

of God's holy presence, wouldn't your guilt overwhelm you? Mine would. Wouldn't your sins shame you? Mine would. Wouldn't you be shaking in your boots, knowing that God could snuff you out because of your foolish words, your selfish deeds, your impure thoughts?

Isaiah was shaking in his boots. "I am unclean," he confessed. And so are we all – unclean before our God. We come into this house of God; and, while this isn't really God's throne, and while we can't see God himself like Isaiah did, we are in the presence of God here! You may be in the back row, or way up in the balcony. But you are this close to God! He is right there with you. You may think that is your pew, and this is your church. But, no, that is God's pew. This is God's church. And we are an unclean people, sitting in the presence of the King, the Lord of hosts! Just like Isaiah.

Back to his story. What does God do? He doesn't snuff out guilty Isaiah. He doesn't vaporize unclean Isaiah. And he doesn't do that to us, either. But he cleanses us.

God sends an angel down to Isaiah. He lifts a burning coal from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touches that hot coal to Isaiah's mouth, and the angel says, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." Isaiah didn't do anything to make that happen, but God did it for him.

What about us? God doesn't use burning coals on us. But he cleanses us, too. He takes away our guilt. God's Son, Jesus Christ, paid for your sin and mine in full, when he died on the cross for us. So when we baptize in his name, when we eat and drink his body and blood, when we confess our sins and hear God speaking powerful words of forgiveness, we are forgiven! The building doesn't shake, and the room isn't filled with smoke; but we are cleansed! We are truly and fully forgiven! Not because we do anything to make it happen, but because Christ the Lord has done it all for us.

We are just like Isaiah, before the throne of God. And there's a glorious lesson for us all to learn about cleansing and forgiveness in Isaiah's story.

But there's another lesson for us, too. What happens next to Isaiah? Remember what God did after he cleansed Isaiah? He sent him out.

Isaiah writes, "And 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.'"

God needed a prophet. He needed a messenger. And the Lord didn't wait for a perfect, holy, sinless job candidate to come along. God picked guilty, unclean, imperfect Isaiah. God cleansed him. And God sent him out.

And that's how it works, friends, with you and me. God needs a school teacher. God needs a plumber. God needs a soldier, or a college student, or a stay-at-home mom, or a retiree, or a drummer, or a dentist, or a nurse, or a landscaper. And the Lord doesn't wait for some perfect, holy, sinless candidates to come along. God picks us! God cleanses us right here! And God sends us out.

What's your vocation? What are you doing this week? God is sending you there, and God has a way in which he wants to use you there – to bless others, to care for someone, to show love to a person who needs it, to give a witness for him, or to be an ambassador for him in some way.

We come here, before the throne of God; and, just like Isaiah, we deserve nothing but trouble from God. But he gives us grace. The Lord cleanses us here. God forgives us here, for Jesus' sake. And then he sends us out.

Can you do his work out there in some way this week? Can you speak his Word, lend a hand, offer a blessing, promise to pray, extend forgiveness, go the extra mile, turn the other

cheek, show some love, give some gift, invite someone to church?

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then we said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Amen.