



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Your Time Has Come” **Sermon on Isaiah 6:1-8**

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Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

Every once in a while, something happens that is so important, it etches itself into our collective memory.

December 7th - what was the year? September 11? The Declaration of Independence was signed when? The Summer of Love was the summer of? We have a collective memory!

Then, there are those moments that happen that are important to just us, but not so much to the rest of the earth.

Does September 4, 1983, mean anything to any of you? That was my first date with Beth. We had dinner at a 7-11, only thing open on a Sunday evening in Iowa. I treated her to a microwaved hamburger and a drink. I figure if you start low, you only can go up. September 4, 1983. Big day!

Then there are important dates that we want other people to know about. June 1, 2006 – does anybody know about that date? That’s when Guy Griffith came to Westminster, 15 years ago this coming Tuesday. Let’s congratulate Guy for 15 years.

Our scripture begins with a corporate event. In the year King Uzziah died, corporate event.

Uzziah was a strong king. He had charisma, a power that emanated from his throne, giving the nation energy and confidence. But when he died, he was followed by kings that didn’t come close to the “Wow!” of King Uzziah! Everyone remembered the year that king Uzziah died - corporate event.

Isaiah pulls the attention off the national time of mourning and says, “You’ll never guess what happened to me.” “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; the hem of his robe filled the temple.” In other words, God just blew the doors and roof off the temple. Nothing can contain the vision. Six winged creatures flying about it all! It’s a scene of radical beauty. Described with the only words that were fitting all the shaking and quaking, “Holy, holy, holy,” which means “Other, other, other.” God is something “Other.”

I think we need to be mindful that Isaiah’s willingness to share such a vision with a larger audience is either a sign of courage or that he’s crazy. Who among us would dare to share such an unusual event with others?

Like she told her mother, “You know mom, it was strange - I was in a sanctuary, listening to the sermon, and I felt as though I understood what was being said...” “Well of course you did, dear.” “No! But mom, I really felt as though I understood. Not in my head, but in my heart. I felt a chill run through my body and the Spirit blew upon me.” “Dear, we were sitting next to the air conditioner system. That’s why I bring a sweater.” “No, mom, it wasn’t the air-conditioner. It was the presence of God!”

“Honey, I listened to the same sermon. Let me tell you, it wasn’t God!”

Who has the courage and confidence to say, “I heard God say to me, whom shall I send?”? That’s why, I think, we stick with the corporate conversation. It’s easier to talk about.

In the year 2021, a 50-year old won the PGA tournament. There’s a conversation I’ve heard a few times this week.

In the year 2021, they stormed the Capitol...conversations abound all around that.

In the year 2021, people are punching flight attendants on airplanes and ranting about masks, and everyone is on their last nerves. Can we talk about that? What’s this collective anger about?

If only we started to talk about our wounds from the last 14 months, if only we could share about how, over the last 14 months, we have lost friends due to politics, or due to the pandemic, or politics and the pandemic. If only we could talk about what we feared and why we feared it. I heard there were two people who expressed their anger at the church, about how we handled or didn’t handle the pandemic. Two people who expressed opposing views. Whatever it was, we did it absolutely wrong, or it wasn’t enough. If we could look into the wounds, hurt, and pain of the body and blood, well, Holy, holy, holy - we might be exposed to something “Other,” the power of God.

In the year 2021, 24-hour news covers it 24-hours a day. They’ll play the same news tapes over and over again about who caused this, and who’s to blame for that, and here’s the gaff, and here’s the failure. Over and over and over again.

I came to worship, and I saw God high and lifted up. Isaiah said, “Woe is me!” There’s the difference between what’s going on in the world and what goes on when one worships God. When we worship God, we have no choice but to humble ourselves. Confronted by the awesome beauty, truth, and love of God, all Isaiah can say is, “that’s not me. I thought I was righteous. I cleaned myself up when I came to church, but woe is me.”

And here’s the thing: God doesn’t play the tape over and over again of Isaiah’s sinfulness. The difference between what happens in the church and what happens in the world is that God is not about playing the tape over and over of our sins. God isn’t into wallowing into our sins, our failures. The angels hear, “Woe is me,” and they come to rescue him, touching his lips.

It happens for us when we, too, come to worship. We sing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” We confess our sins. Woe is me, and then the waters of our baptism are poured into the font.

God says, “Mercy, mercy, mercy, me.” We so want the mercy for ourselves. But are we able to give to one another other? “The Peace of Christ be with you, too.” In the year of the pandemic and politics, are we able to say, “I saw God high and lifted up, and he gave me mercy and told me to do the same.”? “I’m sorry for being so righteous.” If we are not able to provide mercy to one another in the church, I say we sell the property, because we are no earthly good.

Why on earth are we here? To be angry... and bitter... and frustrated? We are here because we are called by God.

The baptism waters have been poured. “Friends, believe the Good News. There is a new creation, and everything has become fresh and new. We are forgiven. Do you believe that? I’m not asking you to believe if “you are” forgiven. I’m not asking you to believe “we are” forgiven. I’m not asking you to believe that you are the judge. I’m asking you to believe that our judge is also our redeemer, and I’m not the one asking. What we do here is not easy like a Sunday morning. It is holy, holy, holy. Completely “Other.” It’s about reconciliation with everyone. Everyone.

In the year when the country is divided, in the year when the rules keep changing, in the year when I feel run over, in the year of anger and bitterness, we are people who dare to say, “I was in the temple and God was there. Woe is me.”

But I know God. I heard God say, “Mercy is me. Whom shall I send to tell the Good News to a sad and divided world?”

Could it be that on this day, May 30, 2021, we might work our way into the collective memory of this world with the Good News? Holy, holy, holy, blessed Trinity. “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”

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