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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Epiphany 5, Series C
Saturday, February 5th, 2022
Sunday, February 6th, 2022

Sermon: “Send Me!”

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

Focus: God makes us holy by his Word of forgiveness.

Function: That they would be sent by God with the message of his holiness and grace.

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: “God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also” (SC, First Petition of Lord’s Prayer).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The Word of the Lord comes to us from the prophet Isaiah: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa. 6:3, ESV).¹ Amen. You’ve come to a dangerous place this morning. You’ve entered a church, after all. And no, it’s not dangerous because of deranged visitors or because the building is structurally unsound. This church is a dangerous place because the LORD *God* is here, the Holy One of Israel, Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of angel armies. “The whole earth is full of his glory,” and when we speak his name and praise him in the song of the seraphim, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” we are invoking his name, inviting him to come among us, and possibly provoking him. And that is at once a terrible and wonderful thing. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). You never know what could happen!

So please fasten your seatbelts, and keep your hands and feet inside the vehicle at all times. In the event of an emergency, please calmly move toward the emergency exits. If there is a sudden loss of cabin air pressure, oxygen masks will automatically drop from the ceiling. Fit

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

the nozzle on your mouth and put the elastic band behind your head. The mask may not fully inflate, but oxygen is flowing, so breathe freely. Be sure to put on your own mask before you assist others.

The Holy, Holy, Holy Lord is not safe—at least not to sinners, as Isaiah discovers in our Old Testament lesson today. The entire Temple shook and filled with smoke on the occasion of one worship service. So perhaps we should be a little afraid when we enter holy places to worship the thrice-holy Lord. Perhaps like Moses we ought to remove our shoes and leave them at the door because the ground upon which we set foot is holy (Ex. 34:5).

While serving my first congregation (before Epiphany), during a neighborhood canvass I met a man who told me that he was afraid to set foot in my church. I asked him why. He answered, “Because I’m liable to get hit by lightning if I do. God and I aren’t on the best terms.” In point of fact, I told him, the church building *had* been hit by lightning one afternoon as I sat in my office. I survived, so he would too. Perhaps I shouldn’t have been so certain.

There’s a scene in C.S. Lewis’s novel, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, in which the human child, Lucy, asks Mr. Beaver if Aslan is safe. Aslan is the Great Lion who represents Christ in the magical world of Narnia, very much the way God might become incarnate in a world full of talking animals. But is Aslan *safe*?

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”²

And in another book in the series, a girl named Jill encounters Aslan the Lion beside a cold stream when she is dying of thirst. The Lion beckons her to come and drink.

“Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: HarperCollins, 1951-1956), 151, Kindle ed.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.³

No, our God is not tame. He’s good, but he’s not safe. He has laid waste to the entire earth by water, and he will do it again someday by fire. But there is no other stream, and there is no other god. But he’s the King, I tell you!

And so does Isaiah:

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’ And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke” (Isa. 6:1-4).

What a glorious vision! What a great and mighty wonder!

And how did Isaiah respond to this theophany? Did he throw his hands in the air and shout, “Hallelujah!” No. No, he did not. Instead he was overwhelmed by terror.

Isaiah cried, “Woe is me! For I am lost”—I am undone, I am silenced—“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!” (Isa. 6:5).

The Bible says that no one can see God and live (Ex. 33:20). Yet Isaiah did. So he was sure that he was done for. God was holy, and he was not. Why? Because he was an unholy sinner, and sin makes a separation between us and the holy, holy, holy Lord. God can allow no unclean thing in his presence.

Isaiah the prophet was full of sin, and so were the people of Israel—so are *we*! So was the king who’d just died. By most standards, Uzziah was a “good” king. He worshiped the one,

³ Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: HarperCollins, 1951-1956), 553, Kindle ed.

true God instead of idols, and he “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Chr. 26:4). He warred against the enemies of God’s people and enjoyed a good, long reign of 52 years.

But Uzziah did one really bad thing. He tried to offer incense on the altar of incense in the Temple—a thing forbidden for anyone other than the priests to do. It didn’t matter that Uzziah was king. It wasn’t his job. But he did it anyway. So God struck him with leprosy from head to foot, and until the day he died, he remained an unclean leper, isolated and hidden from view. Lepers were required to cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” as warning to passersby.

King Uzziah’s leprosy was symbolic of the sinfulness of the entire nation. No matter how much good Uzziah had done, it still wasn’t good enough for God. No wonder that Isaiah trembled and cried out, “I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.” And so in his fear and terror, the stricken sinner confesses his sin.

Yet precisely at the moment Isaiah believed God would destroy him, Yahweh did something else instead. God *forgave* his sin! Yahweh did not come to him to destroy him, but to forgive him and ready him for his calling. He came to make him *clean*. One of the seraphim took one of the coals from the altar and touched Isaiah’s mouth with it and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (Isa. 6:7). God forgave Isaiah’s sin. The holy, holy, holy Lord made *him* holy. He took away his guilt, and then he asked him to go with purified lips and heart to proclaim the message of his love.

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Yahweh asked (Isa. 6:8).

And Isaiah answered, “Here am I! Send me.”

So the man of unclean lips, stunned into silence by God’s holiness, whose guilt is gone and whose lips are purified, now eagerly goes out to share the God’s Word with others. “Here am I!” says Isaiah, “Send me.”

God is ready to forgive us, if we will confess our sins. Although we are people of unclean lips, he has washed us through water and the Word in Holy Baptism. Because Christ atoned for our sin on the cross, he removes our guilt. He forgives our sin. As John says in his first letter, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

Left to our own devices, none of us could stand before God. Yet we need not fear the Holy One, because when we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness—to remove everything sinful and unholy about us—not with a burning coal (thank God!), but with the blood of Jesus. The Holy, holy, holy Lord sanctifies us and sets us apart. The Holy Spirit makes *us* holy. He kills us to make us alive. He wounds that he may heal.

For in Jesus Christ the Holy One became a man who suffered the consequences of sin in our place. Jesus took on human flesh to veil the glory that brings terror to sinful human beings. Truly, there were times when his glory shone through—as in the miraculous catch of fish in our Gospel lesson. Simon Peter cowered before Christ and cried, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). But instead Jesus said, “Do not be afraid.” He comforted Simon and invited the fisherman to become a fisher *of* men. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8).

The unholy sinner in the presence of the Holy God can only cower and cry out, “Woe to me! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips!” But the good and gracious God can only love you and forgive you when you confess your sins. “Do not be afraid...” (Luke 5:10). “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for” (Isa. 6:7). After

God's Word pierces our hearts and touches our lips, we are forgiven. Stricken silent by sin, our lips are opened, and we can tell others what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, so that when the Lord says, "Who will go for us, and whom shall I send?" we can shout with joy: "Here am I! Send me!"

Confession and forgiveness always lead to proclamation. Forgiven saints are sent back into the world to rescue sinners in the name of Jesus. As David sings in Psalm 51:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.... *Then* I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.... O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Ps. 51:10-13, 15).

The lips that have spoken confession, and the tongue that has tasted the Body and Blood of Jesus in the bread and wine are unclean no more. His Word makes us holy and clean. And there are many other people on our planet who need to hear that Word and be cleansed by the Holy, Holy, Holy Lord.

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me'" (Isa. 6:8). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.