

"I Saw God!"

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

Sermon Text: Isaiah 6:1-13



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. ²Above 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. ³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" ⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: "Woe is me! 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!" ⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." ⁸And 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." ⁹And He said, "Go, and say to this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'" ¹⁰Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." ¹¹Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And He said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹²and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. ¹³And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

A little while ago, a grandma came into the church with her grandson. The grandma told me that her grandson had asked her a question – he wanted to know where God is. So all three of us went into the church and I showed them the beautiful window above the altar here at St. Lukas. I tried to explain that you can't see God but that He exists all the same. I used the stained-glass window to illustrate how we envision Jesus and that Jesus isn't just invisible but also visible and present everywhere. I explained that we can talk with Him anytime. The boy showed genuine interest and wanted to immediately speak with Jesus. So we all prayed together. Later, the grandma told me that the boy always asked about God and even speaks with God at home. Religious educators confirm that such questions from children are not uncommon. Children are naturally interested in God. They want to know where God is and what role He plays in their lives. Adults have an enormous responsibility because they can easily block access to God through rational arguments. These questions not only affect adults but especially Christians as well because we have a mission: We should tell people about God. But how can we do that if we can't see God? In our sermon text for today, we see how God revealed Himself to Isaiah. God wanted to call the Prophet Isaiah to proclaim His Word but before He sent this prophet into the world, Isaiah himself must know who he's preaching about. Isaiah is not to spread his own thoughts or philosophies, but God's voice, he should proclaim God's Word and not his own words. But how could he do that if he himself didn't know who this God that he's preaching about is?

God doesn't send clueless people into the world. He sends people into the world who know who God is! Isaiah reports that he saw God. Yet what he saw, remained hidden because God remained veiled. The one thing that Isaiah experienced from God was the thunderous chanting of the seraphim: "Holy, holy, holy..." In truth, God wasn't revealed here but a boundary was drawn because the word "holy" means set apart! It means that Isaiah didn't see God but just a divine line that exists between God and people. On this side of the boundary, it only became clear to Isaiah what doesn't belong to God. And Isaiah was seized with a deep sense of awe! Scales fell away from his eyes and he realized that He had envisioned God completely wrong. Later, he would proclaim to his people: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, Him you shall honor as holy." (Isaiah 8:12-13a) Isaiah realized that the things that we fear mean nothing in God's sight. He also saw that what we consider the highest human or moral achievements melt in the sun like butter. Yes, even the fear of death, terrible wars, and everything else we fear, fade away when we are in God's presence. Today we celebrate the Trinity, we bring

all these things that occupy us, that scare us, or that weigh us down and do nothing more than this – we fall to our knees and say three times: “Holy, holy, holy.”

As Isaiah stood before God’s face, he didn’t see God, but he received a clear and authentic view into his own heart. And he was appalled. He cried out: “Woe is me!” Blessed is the person to whom this glimpse into his own heart is revealed. Blessed is the person who considers God holy! From my point of view, this insight into God’s holiness was significant for Isaiah. Only then did he realize that he and his people were completely separated from God. Ignorance about God goes hand in hand with ignorance about sin – the less people know about God, the less they also know about sin. You can’t recognize darkness when everything around you is dark. Only when light shines into the darkness can we tell the difference between light and dark and can say what is light and what is dark. Most people do not recognize either the darkness or the light. They are in darkness so much that they don’t even notice that there is such a thing as light. So it often happens that people wander around in total darkness and make only minor improvements to the moral state of mankind. In doing so, they are unaware that there is such a thing as light at all. When Isaiah came into God’s presence, it was as if light shone in the midst of darkness. In God’s presence, Isaiah suddenly realized how much he was living in darkness and sin. He could only say, stutteringly: *“Woe is me! 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!”* (Isaiah 6:5) The miracle in Isaiah’s story, however, is that God still cared about Isaiah. Isaiah couldn’t recognize God but amazingly, God could recognize him, and God noticed him. Exactly in that moment when Isaiah was distressed, a seraph flew to him. At this point, it also becomes clear why angels even have wings. If angels only had to remain in God’s presence, they wouldn’t need any wings. They require wings to come to people. And that’s exactly what the angel did as he flew to Isaiah. God sent angels to people to help build a bridge to overcome the huge gap between people and God. What God did impressively through the flying seraphim, He has done even more so by His coming to us in Jesus Christ. He who was equal to God became like us. He became sin for us. Because of this, heaven was opened and the deep chasm between God and people was done away with once and for all. However, none of this happened without pain – Isaiah also had to experience that. The angel didn’t come flying to Isaiah to comfort him. He also didn’t say to Isaiah that his sin wasn’t so bad and he shouldn’t make such a fuss. Instead, the angel touched a burning coal to Isaiah’s lips so that he could be in God’s presence. A glowing coal is hot and burns! This is how it is each time I confess my sin before God, this is how it is when a passage from the Bible moves my heart – a burning coal that reveals the darkness in my heart. That hurts! But it is an important experience that gives us the strength to be in God’s presence. When the angel’s coal touches Isaiah’s lips, it wasn’t a symbolic act but something real. When Jesus took on human flesh, He came not only symbolically as the Son of God but as true man and true God. And because of this Jesus, it’s not just the prophets that receive a special mission, but we all do too. We can all benefit from this Jesus who established the connection between God and people. And when it’s said in church today: “your sins are forgiven,” it’s not just a saying used to comfort but the power of God which is based on this same Jesus. As Isaiah felt the coal on his lips, it wasn’t just his lips that were opened but also his ears and for the first time in the courts of heaven, Isaiah could also hear God’s voice. He heard God calling: “Whom shall I send?” This question was intended for Isaiah. It struck his heart, and he could cry out with a joyful and confident voice: “Here I am! Send me.” How could it be that Isaiah felt condemned to death one moment and commissioned the next? It’s nothing more than this – the Almighty and Infinitely Holy God left His throne and touched Isaiah’s lips. Isaiah must despair of himself but due to the purification of his lips through God Himself, he could now act completely differently. This also happened in the first Christian congregation at Pentecost. When the people were cut to the heart by the Apostle Peter’s sermon, they all cried out together: “What must we do to receive the Holy Spirit?” Peter’s simple answer is found in Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized every one of you...” And these first Christians were also able to boldly go into the world and share God’s Word. It is a miracle that there are Christians today. It is a miracle that we stand here today as a congregation and that people are ready to serve our church as council members. It is a miracle of the Holy Spirit who calls and sanctifies sinful people! Just as Isaiah’s lips were touched with a burning coal, we are given the opportunity to be the church and to be the body of Christ for people around us through the Holy Spirit working in us. For this reason, we can always tell all people, big or small, where to find God and where we can talk with Him. Amen.