

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they flew. ³One called to another and said,

Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Armies!

The whole earth is full of his glory!

⁴The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵Then I said, "I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!"

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth with the coal and said, "Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."

⁸Then I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!"

Here I Am. Send Me.

I.

No one knew it yet, but it was all over.

"Peace through strength." President Reagan used the slogan; so did President Trump. History suggests that the first person to put the concept into words was Emperor Hadrian in the First Century AD.

"Peace through strength" could easily have been the slogan of another popular leader. He began by waging war against his enemies and defeating them. War machines were put into place to defend the capital city. Fortified towers were built in remote areas.

The strength of this ruler became well-known. Could it have been because they feared him that foreign countries began to send diplomats? They didn't want *their* countries invaded and conquered. It was essential that this ruler was aware that none intended to do battle with him. Peace broke out everywhere.

Peace often brings with it prosperity. Such was the case for this leader. Agriculture flourished. So did commerce.

"Peace through strength" continued to be practiced, even though overtures of peace prevailed all around. He maintained a standing army. They were well-equipped and ready to engage the enemy at a moment's notice. The peace and prosperity had to be insured by strength.

"Peace through strength" was employed long before Presidents Trump or Reagan. Before even Emperor Hadrian. The ruler who employed the tactic as I've just described lived hundreds of years before Emperor Hadrian. You can read about his exploits in 2 Chronicles 26. His name was King Uzziah. The Chronicler records: "Uzziah...ruled in Jerusalem for fifty-two years... ⁴He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 26:3-4, EHV).

It's easy to become proud of your accomplishments when there is peace through strength. It's easy to forget where those benefits came from and why they continue. "But when he had grown powerful, the pride in his heart led to his destruction. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God. He entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chronicles 26:16, EHV). No matter how powerful a king of Judah might become, God had reserved the burning of incense for worship to the priesthood. Uzziah violated God's command. God struck him with leprosy, which excluded him from the temple for the rest of his life. Sin took a powerful toll on King Uzziah.

II.

“In the year that King Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1, EHV). King Uzziah was gone. He had begun his reign as a king who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but still showed himself to be a sinner and violated the Ceremonial Law that governed worship at the temple.

No one knew it yet, but it was all over. The “peace through strength” would not continue much longer. Through his prophets God had been promising judgment on Judah. It would come within about 20 years. Babylon would invade and destroy Jerusalem.

With this simple sentence, Isaiah also identifies the time when he was called by the Lord into service as one of God’s prophets. “In the year that King Uzziah died.” I can’t guarantee it, but from all accounts it would seem that Isaiah, already at the time of his call, met the qualifications Paul would later describe for pastors: “It is necessary, then, for the overseer to be above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:2, EHV). It would be no surprise if most people thought Isaiah to be an upstanding citizen—a godly man.

Listen to what he says: “Then I said, ‘I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!’” (Isaiah 6:5, EHV). Isaiah was not good enough to be in the presence of God.

Isaiah had seen. “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they flew” (Isaiah 6:1-2, EHV).

There was no throne in the temple in Jerusalem. God sat on a throne *above* the temple. The temple could not even contain the train of his robe—it *filled* the temple. There were some angels. After the evil angels had deserted God, the rest of them had been confirmed in their holiness. Angels are without sin. Yet, holy as they were, these seraphim did not even dare to look at God. With two of their wings they covered their faces so they might not look directly at the glory of the Lord. They covered their feet to show their submission to the Almighty God.

“One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3, EHV). Repetition of the word “holy” draws attention to the uncompromising lack of sin in God. This lesson falls on Trinity Sunday. The repetition of the word “holy” also identifies the three-times holy God as the Triune God.

In a few moments we will be confessing our faith using the Athanasian Creed. The repetitious nature of the creed identifies some characteristics of God and says: The Father has this characteristic, the Son has this characteristic, the Holy Spirit has this characteristic, yet they are not three having this characteristic, but there is one who has this characteristic. We can say the same about the holiness of God. He is Three in One.

In some of our own liturgies we sing the words of the angel: “Holy, holy, holy Lord God of heavenly hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.”

“The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the temple was filled with smoke” (Isaiah 6:4, EHV). The voice of the angel praising God was so powerful that the whole ground shook, as in an earthquake. The building rattled. The entire worship facility was filled with smoke.

“I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips!” (Isaiah 6:5, EHV). The righteous Isaiah recognized how *unrighteous* he was—how unworthy to be standing in the presence of God. God had said to Moses, the greatest prophet of Israel: “You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20, EHV). He had seen God. His lack of holiness made it impossible for him to live.

III.

Do you ever forget the holiness of God? Not exactly, to be sure, but it’s easy for New Testament Christians to forget that God has attributes other than love. Holy is the attribute that simply does not tolerate sin. Not in the slightest. There is no way *any* human being can

stand in his presence.

Yet—Jesus *did*. Jesus is God, but he is also fully, 100% human. Jesus *could* stand in the presence of God because he is completely holy—without any taint of sin. In his gospel, John quotes from this very chapter of Isaiah and then concludes: “Isaiah said these things when he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (John 12:41, EHV). It is Jesus, in all the holiness of his glory, that is One of the Persons in the Triune God who is on that glorious throne in Isaiah’s vision.

“Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth with the coal and said, ‘Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven’” (Isaiah 6:6-7, EHV). Sinful human beings cannot make any effort to connect with God in all his holiness. Isaiah knew he was doomed and ruined, because he was a sinful human being. The difference between sin and holiness is too great for human effort. God has to do it.

It was all God’s grace. Isaiah did nothing. God showed that even in his holiness that hates sin, still his love and mercy and grace shine through. God’s love took action in sending the seraph with the glowing coal.

Nothing has changed between the time of Isaiah and us. There is still no way that a human being can reach out for God. There is still a vast chasm between sin and holiness. Human effort cannot span the chasm.

The Apostle Paul says: “God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, EHV). Jesus—God himself—was incarnate in human flesh and became fully human. This Jesus—the God-Man—accomplished our salvation on the altar of the cross. The glowing coal of the gospel in Word and Sacraments touches our hearts. Faith in Jesus—given by the Holy Spirit—makes what he did for all belong to each of us individually. It is all God’s grace. You and I have done nothing.

That—and that alone—is the reason we *can* stand in God’s presence. Awesome beyond awesome, as Isaiah’s vision has demonstrated, is the holiness of the Lord. Yet his love is so vast and so wide and so deep that the holiness of the Lord Jesus becomes our own so we can stand in his presence.

IV.

“Then I heard the Lord’s voice, saying, ‘Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am. Send me!’” (Isaiah 6:8, EHV). Isaiah’s vision concludes with his call into the service of the Lord. God reached out and Isaiah answered. Unworthy though he knew he was, Isaiah was willing to proclaim God’s Word.

“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Notice the plural at the end of God’s question. It is the Triune God who asked the question. God still calls. He calls *people*—human beings—unworthy though we might be, to bring this same message of salvation to others.

Not many had the immediate—the direct—call of God speaking to them himself. Isaiah was one. Other prophets received their calls directly. The Apostles, including the Apostle Paul, were all called directly by God. Most receive their call to serve the Lord through the church. Pastors and teachers today are called by the church. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary had “Call Day” just over a week ago to send new graduates to their fields of labor. Martin Luther College had “Call Day” two weeks ago to send out new teachers.

Most Christians don’t serve as pastors and teachers with a full-time call to serve the Lord. Still, the Triune God calls. Whatever your station in life, you have opportunities to share the love of God displayed in Christ Jesus who has forgiven your sin and taken away your guilt. Share God’s love. Answer with Isaiah: “Here I am. Send me.”