

Pastor Joe Polzin  
 Isaiah 6:1-8  
 “The Trinity at Work”  
 Year B – Holy Trinity Sunday  
 May 27, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is Isaiah’s amazing vision of the Lord, where he finds himself in the temple before God and all His majesty. Isaiah puts it into human language the best he can. *It is impressive* – God’s presence is enormous. Just the train of God’s robe fills the temple in Jerusalem. *It is loud* – these heavenly creatures called seraphim call to one another and shake the temple to its foundation. *It is fragrant* – the building is filled with smoke from incense.

Imagine what it would be like to be in the very presence of God Himself. To actually interact with Him one on one. It would be wonderful. It would be awe-inspiring. It would be life-altering. How could any one of us walk away from that and not be changed forever?

But what if I were to tell you that Isaiah’s experience isn’t as rare as you might think? And what if I were to tell you that each and every one of you has had this life-changing experience with the holy Triune God? Doesn’t that sound too unbelievable to be true?

Well, today is Holy Trinity Sunday, which is celebrated one week after Pentecost. It’s when we contemplate and confess the important yet incomprehensible Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three persons, but only one God. So simply stated, yet infinitely complex.

And though we may not be able to fully understand the *nature* of God, He has given us the ability to understand how He works. The Trinity in action. How Father and Son and Holy Spirit all are at work in your life, including the moment you encountered God like Isaiah. And when was that moment? It was in your baptism.

It was there that you were changed, like Isaiah, as our baptism parallels Isaiah’s vision. Our Old Testament reading helps us understand our own baptism, and the way our Triune God is at work in our lives. So, there are four similarities between Isaiah’s vision and our baptism.

First, baptism is for sinners. Isaiah is before the very holy Lord. The blinding radiance of God’s holiness makes visible every imperfection, every impurity that belongs to Isaiah. And Isaiah knows holiness and sinfulness cannot coexist. When *we* come into the presence of God, we also are made painfully aware of just how sinful we truly are. We are foolish to try to do anything before God except, in humility, confess our sins to Him.

And we’ve been sinful since the moment we were alive. Some don’t like to think about that. Some think that perhaps we’re not as bad as we always say we are in church. They might think, “We are by nature sinful and unclean? We have sinned in thought, word, and deed? It’s not like I’ve done anything horrible lately!” Or when we see a newborn baby, we might be tempted to say, “You see? We all start out ok, we just make a few mistakes along the way. It just takes a little dusting off and tuning up.”

But that’s not what God says. His Word tells us that through one man, Adam, sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12) and has infected all of us. That we are all sinful at conception (Ps. 51:5), and we are naturally enemies of God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). That we are born “dead in our trespasses” (Eph. 2:1). And any attempt at righteous deeds are nothing but “polluted garments,” filthy rags (Is. 64:6).

And so, any of us, no matter what age, can't help but enter the presence of a holy God and fully recognize that we are sinful, and we are in need of something other than ourselves to change that. Because we can't change ourselves. And until something from *outside* of us can transform what's inherently *inside* of us, we are all dead. Or as Isaiah says, "Woe is me! For I am lost." When a sinner enters the presence of God, like Isaiah, or like us, he should only expect one thing – to be condemned. And it's why God's reaction to Isaiah, and to us, is amazing. He doesn't condemn. He saves.

That's the second point, baptism saves us. In the moment of our complete despair, God brings help and healing. Think about what Isaiah must have felt when he heard those words, "Your guilt is taken away. Your sin atoned for." Astonishment? Relief? Overwhelming gratitude? God drew close to Isaiah to do for him what he could not do for himself.

And in baptism, God drew near to *you* to do for you what you could not do for yourself. In baptism, He says directly to you, "Your guilt is taken away. Your sin atoned for." As Peter writes in his first epistle, "Baptism...now saves you" (1 Pet. 3:21). God draws near to us to save us.

And in the ultimate act of drawing near to us, God took on human flesh to be one of us and to dwell among us. Jesus carried out God's plan of salvation for the whole world. Jesus' death atoned for all sin. Jesus' resurrection defeated death. This is the eternally true Gospel, and we all know it well.

But have you ever stopped to think just how it is you are actually connected to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? How it is you know that you are saved? When it was that you gained access to all that Jesus did for you?

The answer is in your baptism. Martin Luther once wrote in a sermon, "This blood, [the same blood which Christ shed for us], with its merit and power, He has deposited in Baptism so that [we] attain it there." Luther is saying that Jesus made a deposit, the saving power of His blood, into an account called baptism. And we are not only given access to this account when we are baptized, but we are allowed to make withdrawals as much as we need without fear of it ever running out.

God, in His wisdom, chose water, ordinary water, to team up with His Word and do this extraordinary work. And the fact that baptism is a physical experience as well as a spiritual one is a wonderful thing. Because you can always point to the moment when the water touched your body as the moment God's promise of everlasting life was extended to you. Faith in Jesus didn't originate *within* you. It was a gift given that came from *outside of* you. And that's why you can always trust in it, because its validity isn't up to you! Even if you waver, God never fails. His gift of life to you is always there for you to return to.

The third point is that baptism sets us apart. It is a dividing line in our lives, and everything that follows is radically different than what came before. As Isaiah was in the temple, he saw the seraphim, who make only one appearance in the Bible, here in Isaiah 6. They are six-winged, heavenly creatures, who attend to God. And they have voices that are so loud, they shake the foundations of the temple. They call to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" The Father is holy, the Son is holy, the Holy Spirit is holy.

And the word "holy" means set apart. God, by His very nature, is holy and set apart. He is the only one who is Creator of all things, and everything else is His creation. But, amazingly, since the time of creation, God has been seeking to make His people holy. To set *them* apart, as well. God says to the Israelites in Leviticus, "You shall be holy... for I the Lord am holy and

have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (20:26). And they were holy because they were in a covenant with the Triune God. He shared His name with them and claimed them as His own.

In your baptism, you were made a part of God’s people, His Church. God continues to make His people holy, to set them apart. He has entered into a covenant with His Church, because of the blood offered by His Son, Jesus Christ. And He has shared His name with us and claims us as His own.

Your baptism began with God’s name: “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” So no matter where you go, you have been given the name of God, assuring you that you are His, and He has made you holy, and He has made you a part of the holy family of God, this fellowship of the body of Christ. Baptism is our entrance into the Church, which is why fonts are often placed either where you enter, or where you come up to the rail, so that you are remind that it was through baptism God led you to this place.

Which then leads us to the last point, what we as the Church, the holy and set apart people of God, are to do with our lives. And I’ll give you a hint, it’s not to circle the wagons in this sanctuary and wait out the remainder of our days. No, rather, having received the saving benefits of baptism, and knowing that we are part of God’s holy Church, we are now sent and strengthened by our baptism.

After Isaiah received the gift of forgiveness and atonement from the Triune God, he is then sent by God. God said, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And Isaiah, without hesitation, says, “Here I am! Send me.”

Now, if you take any time to study Old Testament prophets and their quality of life or life expectancy, you’ll see that there’s no earthly reason Isaiah should volunteer for this job. But that’s what God’s transforming power can do. He sends and strengthens Isaiah.

Last week, at Pentecost, we were reminded that the Holy Spirit is the promised Helper, the “power from on high” (Luke 24) who clothes us, sent by Jesus himself. The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to preach the good news to all the ends of the earth. The Holy Spirit continues to work through His Church, working through us to accomplish His will. And sometimes, that’s frightening to hear. Knowing that some part of God’s kingdom is up to you and me. But God doesn’t make poor plans. The Holy Spirit always provides us exactly what we need to carry out God’s will for our lives, whether we realize it in the moment or not.

So, what are we called upon to do? Well, God has given us all have unique vocations in our lives, relationships and situations that God has given only to us. Opportunities where only we are able to speak the truth of God’s Word. And the Holy Spirit allows each one of us to say in response, “Here I am! Send me.” “Send me to my family, send me to my home, send me to my workplace, send me to my neighborhood.” By our baptisms, we have been commissioned and sent to serve and love others, and to share God’s Word with them.

But what about when I falter? When I sin? When I don’t heed God’s call? Does that mean I’ve lost everything? That my baptism didn’t work? That the Holy Spirit isn’t working well in me?

The answer is, of course, no. When you sin, your baptism hasn’t stopped working. Your sin is the result of living between now and the resurrection, when all sin *will* be defeated. Until then, when you fail to do God’s will, the power of your baptism comes in even stronger. And because of your baptism, you can be assured that when you do fail, God doesn’t fail you.

Luther writes in the Large Catechism, “We always have access to [baptism]... Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to baptism.” When you sin, you

repent, and turn to God. And the promise of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ that was first delivered in your baptism is found waiting there for you time and time again.

This Holy Trinity Sunday, it's our joy to confess our belief in our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we confess not only who He is, but also what He does on our behalf. He has worked powerfully in each of our lives. We, like Isaiah, are sinners who have been saved, set apart, and now sent and strengthened to live our lives each day in light of our baptism, until the day when we, too, will see our Triune God face to face. In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.