

# HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS HE LORD!

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First Lesson; Romans 8:14-17

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 150

Gospel Lesson; John 3:1-17

Sermon Text; Isaiah 6:1-8

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord  
and Savior, Jesus Christ

Amen

The Word of God for our consideration on this Trinity Sunday is our  
Old Testament reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter  
six, verses one through eight.

This is in our Savior's name.

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. Above  
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. One called to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the  
Lord of Armies! The whole earth is full of His glory!"

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

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!”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He 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.”

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!”

These are your words Heavenly Father. Sanctify us by your truth.

Your Word is truth.

Amen

It is almost a custom, isn't it, on Trinity Sunday, to sing the hymn we just sang, ***Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!*** But, maybe we don't often think about the people who create, and write our hymns. ***Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!*** was written by a man named Reginald Heber. He is known mostly today for his hymns, but when he was alive on this earth, we would have probably considered him a pretty interesting guy. The intellectually gifted son of a well-off family, Reginald Heber basically turned down a life of wealth, and earthly success so that he could become a pastor, so that he could preach, and teach The Word of God. He was ordained, and installed as an Anglican Priest in a little town in England. That is where he served faithfully for sixteen years, as a young man. He got married, started his family, and was happy serving in this small town church. All of a sudden, out of the blue one day, he gets a call to become a foreign missionary, and go half way around the world to India.

After wrestling with this call, he decides, “*OK, I am going to go*”.

He and his wife pack up everything. They pack up their child they have together, and go to India.

He is installed as the bishop of Calcutta. All of a sudden, his life has

all of these new responsibilities. He is not just responsible for one, little, country church, but really for the entire mission work that was going on all across, not only the nation of India, but also East Asia, and Australia, for the Anglican Church. He is responsible for all of this. He is traveling around every single week, and he is gone for months at a time from home.

The work is taking its toll, but he is seeing the fruit of The Gospel, everywhere he goes. He sees crowds of people who were former Hindus and Muslims, who are now saved by the grace of God, and Jesus Christ. Reginald Heber even had the privilege of ordaining the first native, Indian, Anglican pastor.

We hear about guys like Reginald Heber, or some other heroes of our faith, and we even think about some of the people in The Old Testament, like the prophet that we just read about. We hear these stories, and isn't it amazing to think about how God works in their lives, how God shaped these people into faithful servants for His Kingdom?

And yet, when we think about these people, these people we kind of hold up as heroes of the faith, there is also a part of us that compares ourselves to them, and says, "*Well, God is obviously working in this person's life. But, where is God working in my life?*"

We don't always see the way God is forming and shaping us, as His servants. And yet, here in Isaiah, chapter six, as we listen to Isaiah, (*probably one of the greatest prophets of the whole Old Testament*), as we hear Isaiah tell the story of how God called him into the prophetic ministry, we are really hearing for ourselves how our gracious God works in all of our lives, how He forms and shapes us, as His servants here on earth, to carry out the callings He has given us, to do the holy work that He has given us to do. He does it by revealing Himself to us in the fullness of holiness. We see that holiness revealed to us in three different ways, here in Isaiah chapter six. That is why our theme for today is ***Holy, Holy, Holy is the***

**Lord!**, because we are going to think about these three different holiness that God reveals to us.

The first of these, the first holy, is the fact that God, when He reveals us in His holiness, **He first of all confronts us with the holiness of His majesty**. Like I said before, this is the account Isaiah gives of his own calling into the office of prophet. When God called him to be a prophet, He actually gave Isaiah a vision of the Heavenly Temple. Not the temple in Jerusalem, but the Heavenly Temple, the Temple of Heaven, where God is actually seated in His Throne Room. What does Isaiah see in that Heavenly Temple? Just listen to the way Isaiah describes what happens, what transpires in front of his eyes.

“In the year that King Uzziah died...” (*The king is dead. Everybody is wondering what the next king is going to be like.*)

Isaiah said, **“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted...”**

You think about how awesome a sight that must have been for Isaiah to, all of a sudden, find himself seeing that Heavenly Temple, and seeing God, Himself, seated on that throne. Then he said,

**“and the train of His robe filled the temple.”**

You know there are a couple of things to bring out there about kings who sit on their thrones.

Number one, no one sits higher than the king. There is God, seated high, and exalted in His Heavenly Temple, showing His divine power and authority that He is over all the kings of the earth.

Then, Isaiah talks about seeing the train of His robe. A king's robe, the length of the train on a king's robe was an indication of his power and authority. How long is the Lord's train on His robe? It filled the entire temple. That is one powerful King!

But wait. It gets even better!

**“Above Him stood the seraphim.”**

Isaiah notices the seraphim. Seraphim are a special kind of angel.

We only ever hear about them, here in Isaiah, chapter six. The seraphim are angels who are privileged to serve in the very presence of God. The word seraphim is interesting because the root of it, *'sera'* for one angel, *'sera'* comes from the Hebrew word for *'fire, or burning'*. So you imagine these fiery angels who are serving in the presence of God. Listen to how Isaiah describes them. He says,

**“Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces.  
With two they covered their feet.  
With two they flew.”**

You imagine seeing these fiery, super natural beings. And yet, there in the presence of God, they are showing tremendous reverence by covering their face in His presence. Not even the angels in Heaven can look upon the naked glory of God. And yet, what are they doing? They are calling one to another, Isaiah says. Imagine a huge antiphonal, heavenly choir where one side is singing, or shouting, and the other side is shouting in response. They said,

**“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies!  
The whole earth is full of His glory!”**

That refrain is repeated again, and again, and **again**. The voice of those seraphim, the voice of those angels is so loud, and so deep that Isaiah is standing there, watching that Heavenly Temple shake, and quake. The door posts are rattling, the floor is rumbling, and the whole temple is filled with smoke. All at once, Isaiah is faced with the holiness of God's majesty. All at once, he is confronted with God's infinite perfection, as the King of kings, and Lord of lords. All at once, he is recognizing, in person, the holiness of God that separates Him from the rest of His creation, that puts God beyond anything we can possibly imagine. That is what God wanted Isaiah to see. Frankly, because it is in Scripture, that is what God wants us to see. He wants us to understand that majestic nature He has, the holy nature of God that sets Him apart from us sinful, human beings. The fact that God reveals Himself in Scripture, not just in terms of

His divine majesty, but in His incomprehensible nature, the fact that God reveals Himself to us in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three separate distinct persons, and yet still one God, it is completely beyond our understanding, beyond our comprehension. How can this possibly be true? We don't know. But, there are arch angels singing,

**“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies!  
The whole earth is full of His glory!”**

Now, put yourself in Isaiah's shoes. Imagine standing in that Heavenly Temple, and seeing the ground shake with the noise of the angels, as they call out that refrain over, and over again, as he sees God seated on that throne, high and exalted, with His train filling the entire temple, surrounded with all of the smoke that is rising up! Put yourself in Isaiah's shoes for a minute. How do you feel? How big do you feel? Not very big.

Isaiah was completely overwhelmed. There is only one thought that comes into his mind. **“I am doomed!”** *“I am going to die.”*

**“I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips...”**

He is talking about his own sinfulness. He goes to that word, **“unclean”**. That is the same word the lepers were supposed to call out, whenever somebody who was healthy got too close. They were supposed to call out, and say, *“Unclean. Unclean. **Unclean.**”*

Unclean things cannot survive in the presence of a holy God. Isaiah says, *“Not only am I a man of unclean lips, but I live among the people of unclean lips. Their uncleanness is on me, too.”* He says, *“I am unclean.”* **“...because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Armies!”**

Seeing God in all of His majestic glory caused Isaiah to realize his own unworthiness to stand before God. That is the point.

C.S. Lewis, the author of the Chronicles of Narnia once said this.

“In God you come up against something that is in every respect immeasurably greater than yourself, immeasurably superior to

yourself. Unless you know God that way, unless you know God as immeasurably superior to yourself, and by comparison know yourself as nothing, you do not know God at all.”

That is an important truth for us to hold on to, because sinful pride doesn't want to put God way up high, and exalted. Sinful pride wants to look at God as my buddy. Sinful pride wants to look at God, and say, “*God likes me more than you, because He knows I am better than you.*”

The truth is, in the face of God's holiness, in the face of God's holy majesty, we are all doomed, and ruined human beings, because of our uncleanness. There is no amount of uncleanness, not even the tiniest unclean lip, not even the tiniest bit of sinful pride living in our hearts that can stand in the presence of a holy God.

That is one of the ways God shapes our lives, isn't it? It is one of the things God works in us - that realization of His superiority to us in His Word.

He does it for a reason. He reveals to us the holiness of His majesty, so that **He can also touch us with the holiness of His mercy**. That is the second of our three holiness. The holy majesty of God is frightening, isn't it? Isaiah thought he was going to die, right where he stood, because of his own person uncleanness before God.

Then things got even weirder, didn't they? He said,

**“Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs.”**

Now, put yourself again, put yourself in Isaiah's shoes. You see this angel coming at you, soaring at you like on eagles wings, carrying this glowing hot coal in his hand, after you have already realized, “*I deserve to die.*” What do you think is going to happen? If you are Isaiah, you are probably thinking to yourself, “*That's it. This angel is going to do me in, right now.*”

But then, the angel does something completely unexpected.

**“He touched my mouth with the coal...”**

It did not burn!

**“He touched my mouth with the coal and said,  
'Look, this has touched your lips,  
so that your guilt is taken away,  
and your sin is forgiven.'”**

Isaiah was touched with the holiness of God's mercy, the mercy that lets go of all of his sins, lets go of all of his guilt, that purges away the uncleanness of his lips, and of his heart, and atones for all of his sins.

As the scene plays out, if you really think about where Isaiah is in this moment, we can have the Lord's mercy touch us too, the holiness of His mercy.

Again, this is not the temple in Jerusalem with the altar of incense. This is the the Heavenly Temple where Isaiah is standing. The altar that is there, the sacrifice that is burning on that altar is the once for all sacrifice that was paid for by God, the Son. The once for all sacrifice that Jesus made at the cross. It is the sacrifice that not only -forgives all the sins committed in the future, after that sacrifice was made,  
-but also forgives all of the sins committed in the past, in history,  
-forgives all of Isaiah's sins,  
-forgives your sins,  
-my sins,  
-and the sins of all the people of the world.

We receive that wonderful mercy, knowing our unworthiness to stand before God, knowing that even though we are just unclean sinners, our guilt has been released from us. Our uncleanness has been purged away by the blood of Christ.

We think about the words Jesus said in our Gospel reading for today.

**“For God so loved that world  
that He gave His only-begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish,**



**but have eternal life.**  
**For God did not send His Son into the world**  
**to condemn the world,**  
**but to save the world through Him.”**

God did not appear to mankind, and reveal His glory to mankind to condemn us, and send us to Hell, but to save the world through Him, to save the world through His Son.

Think about how the Lord still touches us with the holiness of His mercy through His Word and Sacraments.

-Every time one of us pastors say to you, (like we said to you this morning), “*Your sins are forgiven*”,

-every time you are comforted by one the promises of God in His Word,

-every time you come to the Lord's Table and receive Jesus' body and blood under the bread and wine,

-you are receiving the holiness of God's mercy.

-You are receiving the forgiveness of all of your sins.

**“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies!”**

Which brings us ultimately to that third holy. By revealing to us the majestic holiness of His nature, revealing to us our unworthiness to stand before Him, by touching us with the mercy of His forgiveness, **God inspires us to the holiness of His mission.** Now that his sins are forgiven, Isaiah gets to overhear a conversation. It is interesting the way God does it. He does it as though Isaiah is not part of the picture, at all. He is talking, knowing Isaiah is in the room. Isaiah, pretends like he is overhearing. He hears God say, hears this wonderful conversation between the three persons of the Trinity,

**“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”**

You think about that question. “*Who will I send? Who will go for us?*” God does not force Isaiah in to anything. God does not coerce Isaiah into being His servant, being His prophet. He just lays out the opportunity in front of him.

Isaiah is so inspired by the mercy of God, in spite of his own unworthiness, that he is eager to answer,

**“Here I am. Send me!”**

He answers with such eagerness, and energy that he doesn't even think about what God wants him to do. He has not heard anything about what God wants him to do. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, because he has been humbled by God's majesty, touched by God's mercy, and he is ready to serve.

When we think about the opportunities God gives us in our own lives to serve, oftentimes it is the same way, when He deals with us. He doesn't force us in to things. He doesn't coerce us into things. But, He lays opportunities in front of us. He says, *“Who will go for us?”* Maybe it is an opportunity in your family to read a Bible story to one of your kids. Maybe it is an opportunity to serve in the congregation as an officer, or board member, or serve on some committee in the church. Maybe it is an opportunity to study to become a full time preacher, or teacher of The Word. Whatever it is, God lays that opportunity in front of us.

Sometimes we wish we could have that same eagerness Isaiah had. We wish we could be so eager to say, *“Here am I! Send me!”* But, we start to think about all of the complicating factors. We start to think about all the things that make it hard. And yet, if you really think about it, if you really consider the fact that sometimes we think, *“I am not worthy enough to be in that position”*, or *“I don't know enough to do that job”*, God reminds us in His Word that none of us are worthy. He is the One who has given us everything. He is the One who has touched our lives with His mercy. He is the One who gives us the opportunity to serve, and the privilege to serve. It is knowing His grace that we are also able to say, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts,

**“Here am I. Send me.”**

When you think about the way God's holiness shaped the lives of

His saints, when you think about the way God's holiness shaped the life of the prophet Isaiah, or you think about the way God shaped the life a guy like Reginald Heber (who found himself half way around the world in India) it is amazing to think about.

Reginald's time in India was pretty short lived. One day, after he preached all morning on a very hot day, he was physically exhausted. He went to take a cold bath. They found him dead of a stroke, three weeks before he turned forty-three, three weeks before his forty-third birthday. But, here is the shocking twist of Reginald Heber's story. If Reginald had not died in India, we would probably have never known any of his hymns. We probably would not have sung '*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty*' today. It was only after his death in India, when his wife needed to earn some income. She took all the many poems, and hymns that he wrote, and had them published. Amazing, isn't it? God can even do faithful work in the lives of His servants, even in death. As unworthy as we are, our God, the Lord of Armies, whose incomprehensible glory fills this whole earth, chooses to carry out His holy mission among us, through unworthy sinners like us. It is amazing to think about! And, you can also know that God is going to continue to work in your life. He is going to continue, through His Word and Sacrament, to bring you to a dedication for His saving truth, that you never thought you could have, a dedication that willingly answers the call,

**“Here I am. Send me.”**

Amen

Now, the peace of God, that surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts, and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen