

The Message for June 3, 2012**Isaiah 6:1-8***Seeing God***The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

Story: Two boys, ages eight and ten, were excessively mischievous. They were always getting into trouble and their parents were certain that if any mischief happened in town, their two boys were involved in some way. The parents were at their wit's end as to what to do about their sons' behavior.

The parents had heard that a pastor in town had been successful in disciplining children in the past, so they contacted him. He agreed to give it his best shot. He asked to see the boys individually, so the eight-year-old was sent to meet with him first. The pastor sat the boy down and asked him sternly, "Where is God?"

The boy made no response, so the pastor repeated the question in a more stern tone, "Where is God?"

Again the boy made no attempt to answer, so the pastor raised his voice even louder and shook his finger in the boy's face, "WHERE IS GOD?"

At that moment, the boy bolted from the room, ran home, and hid in a closet. His older brother followed him into the closet and said, "What happened?"

The younger brother replied, "We are in BIG trouble this time. God is missing and they think we did it!"

I love stories like that. One thing that makes a good story even better is the potential to see ourselves in it. I won't tell you where I see myself in that story. You can guess. When we place ourselves in a story, it becomes our story – a living story. That is so true of God's story.

Throughout the summer we will hear some of the best known and least known stories in the bible. We will discover the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. These stories will shape our lives, inspire our imaginations, and send us forth to be the people God is creating us to be.

Today we hear Isaiah's story. His story begins with a vision of what it looks like to be in the presence of God. His story invites us to consider how we might approach the presence of God here in worship.

We are told it was the year King Uzziah died -- putting it around 740 B.C. This authenticates Isaiah's story. Uzziah is remembered as a king who invested in the nation, but he contracts leprosy and hands over the leadership of the nation to his son, Jotham. This suggests that King Uzziah must have been a bad king because only bad things

happen to bad people and good things happen to good people or so the thinking went. But we know better.

Isaiah shares a vision of heaven, a temple, the throne room of God, from which God controls all things. The ancient worldview believed that heaven was “up,” so this throne room is “high and lofty.” It is a huge room but still not enough to contain the fullness of God. The hem of God’s robe fills the temple. At least two six-winged creatures called Seraphs are serving and worshipping God. Their voices are so loud that the floor shakes when they speak. There is smoke but we are not told where it comes from but it adds a certain mystery and holiness to the story.

Isaiah finds himself in God’s presence and he is scared out of his wits! Isaiah admits that he doesn’t belong in God’s presence. He says he is lost and in the wrong place. He admits to having sinful lips, the sign of a sinful heart. He admits that he is living with sinful people, who have sinful hearts. Isaiah is in the living presence of God. And in that moment he can think of only one thing – he’s toast! He is not getting out of there alive.

Taking a coal from the altar with a pair of tongs, one of the seraphs comes towards Isaiah. I can see him closing his eyes thinking, “This is it! This is how I’m going to die. Good bye world.” The seraph touches Isaiah’s lips and cleanses him, blots out his sin and removes his guilt. Isaiah is forgiven.

He comes into God’s presence and doesn’t die but is forgiven. Then he hears the voice of God thunder, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah is the only one standing there. Who do you think God had in mind to send? Listen now to our reading from Isaiah 6:1-8...

(read text)

This is a vision of what it looks like to be in God’s presence. This is a picture of worship. We tend to think of worship as something we do on the weekend for an hour or so on Sunday morning. And it is important for us to gather for worship regularly to do just that. And yet, if God is everywhere then we worship God everywhere we go by how we live our lives. Worship is a lifestyle.

Isaiah finds himself in God’s presence. Of course, we are always in God’s presence but at certain times we’re more conscious of God’s presence than we are at other times. Worship is one of those times.

When you think of worship on Sunday mornings I invite you to think of soap. S-O-A-P. I got this idea from Bishop Hoover at synod assembly this past week when he talked about those going to our 2013 national assembly in Pittsburgh. When you think of worship think of soap, S-O-A-P.

S is for singing praises to God.

That's one of the things we do in worship, we sing. We Lutherans love to sing. The seraphs break into song with (sing this out boldly...) *Holy, Holy, Holy... Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee...* Their singing is so loud it shakes the floor. This tells me that God likes loud music in worship, the louder the better. Our singing should shake the floor. Sometimes that happens with the organ and sometimes that happens with the band.

To sing praises to God is to honor God – giving thanks to God for all the blessings in our lives. God is the focus of our singing in worship. If we are not focused on God in worship, we are focused on the wrong thing.

How often do we evaluate worship based on what we like or what we get out of it, without thinking what God likes or what God gets out of it? Singing praises to God reminds us that God is the focus of worship. Singing praises to God reminds us that God is God and we are not. Singing expresses our gratitude and our submission putting us in a right relationship with God. Our singing is for God.

So, let's make a joyful noise when we sing in worship. Let's sing with our lips and with our hearts to the only One who is worthy of our praise. S is for singing praises to God, S-O....

O is for open. Open to the truth.

In worship we hear the truth about ourselves and about God. We are sinners. We fall short of God's intentions for us. When Isaiah realized that he was in God's presence, he responded, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

In the ancient world it was believed that if a sinful person would see God, they would die. We are sinners. We deserve to die. Woe to us because we are not worthy to be in God's presence in this place. But in God's goodness Jesus has taken care of that for us. Because of Jesus we are worthy. When God sees us, God sees Jesus in us.

In worship then we are to be open to God's forgiveness. God forgives. We are forgiven sinners in this place. My favorite part of worship is when I declare the forgiveness of your sins. (And I know about your sins). That's a God moment for me in worship. I hope you experience God's forgiveness in this place. I hope you are open to God's grace in this place because Jesus has set us free from our sins.

It reminds me of going to a restaurant. You eat a wonderful meal. You've had a great time together with family or friends. When you go up to pay your bill, the cashier says "Your bill has been paid. You're free to go." Jesus has paid our bill! We are free to go. O is for being open to the truth, S-O-A...

A is for acceptance

Something remarkable happens when Isaiah admits his sins in God's presence. He doesn't die. Instead, an angel of the Lord takes a burning coal from the altar, touches Isaiah's lips, and says, "Your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." God could have simply said, "You're forgiven." But as a gift of grace Isaiah's forgiveness is not just proclaimed with words but shared through something tangible and experiential.

For us, God's grace touches our lips through the bread and wine of communion. Just as that hot coal touched Isaiah's lips to embody God's forgiveness, the bread and wine embody God's forgiveness for us. In this meal, we touch and we taste God's grace. Our guilt has departed and our sin is blotted out.

You are accepted here in God's presence – whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey of faith. God accepts you the way you are but loves you too much to leave you that way. A is for acceptance. S-O-A-P...

P is for purpose

Notice how Isaiah's vision ends. God called for a volunteer the army way, someone who would go into the world to do God's work. Isaiah responds to that call saying, "Here am I. Send me!" After an experience with God you want to go and share it with others. And yet, I wonder how many of us respond instead saying, "Here am I. Send somebody else."

The truth is every week our worship ends with the words, *Go in peace to love and serve the Lord*. And we respond, *Thanks be to God*. Each one of us is sent by God to live our lives in thanks and praise everyday for what God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives.

The words, *Go in peace to love and serve the Lord*, remind us that our worship has ended and now our service in the world begins. I love the sign at the end of our parking lot that says it so well, "You are now entering your mission field."

God has called you, forgiven you, and sent you with a purpose to live the story of love. Will you? Remember to take SOAP with you. Amen.