

**Sermon on Isaiah 6:1-8 for Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany 2.10.19**  
**St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – New Ulm, Minnesota – Pastor Nate Scharf**

You ever regret volunteering for something? You signed up for what you thought was an hour or two and it turns into all Saturday. You planned to help a friend move a few items, and suddenly you find yourself on the heavy end of a piano going upstairs, knowing full well the wrong move and your back is done. You look for “team effort,” but it’s just you. A man named Isaiah volunteered when God asked. The work would be long and difficult. It would consume his entire life. He would not be popular with many people, but he did it wholeheartedly and with peace in his heart. Why? How? Today we see the key to salvation and service. **Jesus saves sinners and calls them to serve.**

*Isaiah tells us - “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (NIV 2011).* The final year of stability for the people of Judah, King Uzziah’s 52-year reign was ending. They’d see a few good kings and a few more peaceful moments, but most were spiritually rotten, politically unwise, militarily weak with constant threat from invaders. It was going to get bad quickly. God brought Isaiah into his presence. Isaiah was low, the Lord – high and exalted. God sat on a throne. God’s robe filled the temple. The sight was glorious!

*“Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”* Isaiah looked up and saw God and then angels. Four wings humbling themselves and with two they flew above the Lord ready to do his bidding. And what was their greatest work? Singing praise to God – *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”* God is 3x holy. He is perfect, sinless. His knowledge and wisdom are perfect. His decisions are perfect and just. He is separate from sin and from sinners. *“The whole earth is full of his glory.”* God left evidence of his perfection and glory in his creation – a conscience in every heart with the echo of his standard. His beauty is reflected in each sunset, his wisdom as we scientifically uncover more and more of his order and love in the way our bodies work and heal, the way a plant grows.

And a lightbulb goes on in Isaiah’s brain, *“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my*

*eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” God is holy, holy, holy. He doesn’t tolerate sin or sinners. Had we met Isaiah, we may have thought Isaiah was a good guy, fine and upstanding, from a nice family, decent friends, worked hard, did his best, tried to help people. But standing before God there was something painfully clear: Isaiah was a sinner. He was born in sin and his heart was sinful all the time. Jesus would later say, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34). Isaiah knew his heart, his mind and with his words and actions. And looking at his country – they were sinful too. They should have been praising God every moment of every day in word and action, but idols dotted the landscape and their hearts. And then to see the LORD Almighty in his glory – no one can do that and live. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined!” And he was. He deserved God’s judgment with no escape and no excuse. God had brought him to this, and Isaiah was terrified in his presence.*

That is what the Law of God does, doesn’t it? Whether you measure yourself up against the ten commandments or the golden rule, we fail miserably. We can try to do more good than bad, but if we realize God cares not just about the outward action, but about what is going on in our hearts, our response is the same as Isaiah’s. *Woe to me!* And should I spell out the abominations that take place daily around our own country and in our community? Open the front page of the paper. Look on your feed. More and more we call sin and sinful actions not just tolerable but a right to be accepted, used and promoted by everyone. But Isaiah stood in front of the Holy God. We shouldn’t compare ourselves to others to find justification. We stand in our sin, our greed, lust, laziness, and idolatry just fine before others, sometimes even ourselves, but before Holy God we see the sinfulness that inhabits every part of us. We are corrupt, separated from God. We deserve judgment. And what is his judgment? For Isaiah, for us?

*“Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”* In one fell swoop, literally (an angel flew with a coal from the altar), God showed Isaiah that though he was sinful, God took away his sin and atoned for it. The coal from God’s altar touched his lips – the proof that God had done this. Unasked, unforced, unearned our just God in his mercy forgave the sin and sinfulness of Isaiah.

Has he not done the same for us? Before God, no charade works, no excuse suffices – we stand in our sinfulness. But God points us to the cross where the ultimate sacrifice was made to pay the penalty of your sins and the price of

your freedom. You are forgiven in this same way – unasked, unforced, unearned all by the grace and mercy of our just God who gave up his only perfect son to buy us back and forgive us, a real Savior for real sinners! Through this Word delivered not by an angel, but from the pages of Scripture, from your pastor, from your parent, teacher, you hear God’s verdict – *“Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”* You are forgiven. He does not put a coal to your lips. But water is poured over you and God’s name placed on you, your name written in heaven, your sin washed away. Bread is put in your hand, a cup of wine to drink and Jesus Christ gives you of his own body and blood with that bread and wine for your forgiveness. Forgiveness, forgiveness, Forgiveness, Forgiven. You are at peace with God. All God’s doing. All God’s gift.

*“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here I am. Send me!”* Isaiah, do you know what you are signing up for? Don’t you want to ask a few questions first? Isaiah knew enough. He knew that Almighty God has forgiven him and now was offering to him the opportunity to serve him and speak for him. Would it be hard? Beyond anything you or I could imagine. Would it be long term? From what we know – every day of his life, even martyrdom. Would it be worth it, fulfilling, make him happy? Isaiah already had all those things which the world offers but can never deliver. He had God’s love, his forgiveness for his sinfulness, and real peace lasting more than any feeling, to sustain him whatever crosses came. Isaiah said, *“Here I am. Send me!”*

Dear brother and sister in Christ, you have those same things – we have God’s love. If it were dependent on our performance we wouldn’t, but God gives it to us, and it is certain. We have God’s forgiveness – not earned or cajoled by my efforts or deeds but poured out because Jesus shed his blood for all so God remains just and the one who justifies. We have peace with God. Jesus Christ who sits on the throne not only frees us from guilt and it’s control over us, but he says, *“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”* And you say *“Here I am. Send me!”*

Wait a minute, do you know what you are signing up for? Do you know for how long this will last? Will it be hard? Will people like us or hate us for it? What does that matter? God has enlisted you in his service – freed you from your guilt and shame and set you free to serve. Are you a child? Can you be patient with mom or dad and work hard to please them and do as they ask? Are you a student? Can you work harder to pay attention – to be well rested and up for class – to be prepared and engaged? Are you a parent – can you model what it

means to forgive and be forgiven – to be patient with your children, discipline them, love them, and share God’s Word with them, pray with them and for them? Are you a spouse – can you take the effort to communicate with your love and encourage them each day? Can you put away the distractions and take time for each other? Do you work – can you go at it selflessly for the good of those you serve and will be served by what you do, without complaining or grudging? Are you a fellow Christian – can you live to praise your God each day with your words, actions and thoughts – in what you say, in what you post, in how you care for your fellow mankind? Can you be generous with your time, offerings and talents? Can you make worship time and hearing/learning God’s Word priority with your presence and with your hearts? Whether you are preaching from a pulpit, prying off a pamper and grabbing the wipes or simply taking time for a child, a friend, or a stranger and listening – you are doing God-pleasing work for him. This is good work.

God didn’t send a perfect person out that day to serve him as his prophet. He sent Isaiah – a forgiven sinner who would need that forgiveness, love and peace from God each day. God doesn’t send a perfect person out to serve him now. He sends you – a forgiven sinner who needs God’s forgiveness, love and peace each day. How can we do it? Who will help us? God sent a perfect person to serve him – and he did – lived, died and rose again to show you your future and that he will never leave you. Jesus Christ goes with us to help us serve. **Jesus saves sinners and sends you to serve.** Amen.