

# A HOLY GOD -- A HOLY PEOPLE

Isaiah 6:1-8

Trinity Sunday - May 27, 2018

It's hard to believe that it was almost **20 years ago in December 1998**, that that ever-popular **LIFE MAGAZINE** published a special edition -- with the whole publication being focused on God. **On the front cover**, there was printed in very big letters, **the question: "When You Think About God, What Do You See?"** That is, when you think about God, what kind of images come to mind for you?

**To help answer this question, there were numerous articles inside; designed to help people explore their options.**

One of these articles was written by an **Irish-American author named Frank McCourt** who was **BORN in Brooklyn, New York, in October 1930**; exactly one year after the **greatest economic downturn** took place in the history of the **industrialized world**. You know what I am talking about; **the crash of the stock market in 1929**; resulting in what later became known as the **GREAT DEPRESSION**; a financial depression that would last for ten years; all the way from 1929 to **1939**.

**Frank McCourt remembered growing up in Brooklyn in a community that was full of Irish-Americans**, and how--somehow--the news got around the neighborhood where he was living that he **had born only 4 months after his parents were married; SO THAT HE WAS THEREFORE TREATED, AT TIMES, BY OTHER CHILDREN IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AS IF THIS WAS SOMEHOW HIS FAULT; AS IF THIS WAS SOMEHOW SOMETHING THAT HE WAS SUPPOSED TO FEEL ASHAMED OF--THOUGH, WITH RESPECT TO THIS PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCE IN HIS LIFE, HE KNEW PERSONALLY, THAT HE WAS INNOCENT OF ALL WRONGDOING!** There was even a word that people had for people like him, that used to wound him deeply every time he heard it; **a word that began with a "B"!**

**In his article Frank McCourt was cautioning people against allowing their mistreatment by other people somehow define for them, their perception of God.** He wrote: **"Don't let an overly critical father, or an emotionally distant mother, or an abusive stepfather, or an unloving teacher define for you your understanding of God!"**

Throughout the Bible, God teaches us that parents are his chief representatives in the lives of his children; and yet none of us have ever been in the position of choosing our own parents. Therefore, if we were/are blessed with good parents, Martin Luther tells us in his **LARGE CATECHISM** that this should be considered by us as our "greatest earthly treasure."

St. Paul writes to the Ephesians saying: **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother! And fathers, do not exasperate your children, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4)!**

**Friends, when you think about God, what do you see?**

**The words of the Old Testament Lesson (Isaiah 6:1-8) are the words of the Prophet Isaiah, recalling for the people of Israel and for us, how he had somehow wound-up being a prophet, being a spokesperson, for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!**

**One day, it seems, that WHEN he was in the Temple of God in Jerusalem, that somehow, he also gained access into certain parts of the temple precincts, from which the average Jew, would have no doubt been STRICTLY--forbidden to enter.**

It's possible that in addition to being called upon by God to be a prophet, that he had been also a member of the "Upper Crust" of Jewish society in his day, and that he was also a Levitical priest---a direct descendent of Jacob's son Levi, all who by their right of birth, were designated to be priests! **Some commentators suggest that he may have even found his way into the most sacred part of the temple precincts--that he HAD EVEN gained access into the innermost section known as the "Holy of Holies."** There he would have been able to see the **ARK OF THE COVENANT** that was covered with **two cherubim (those baby-looking angels with wings)!**

**The long-flowing trail of the royal garment in which the King of kings appeared to Isaiah was so large that it "filled the temple."**

**The smoke in the temple that day may have referred to smoke that was rising into the air from the incense that was bring offered by the priests that day!**

**I have always had a tendency to think about this experience of Isaiah as his having had an enormous VISION--not totally unlike the VISION that the Apostle John would have many years later, when God would pull aside the curtain from heaven, and allow him to glimpse NOT ONLY into the future, BUT to glimpse into that very place called heaven--and to write down there what he saw--to encourage believers all throughout the history of the church, of the things yet to come!**

**There the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY was seated ever so high and gloriously upon his magnificent throne. As stated, the train on his robe was so magnificent that it filled the whole temple. As stated the place was filled with smoke from the incense of the altar being offered up to God that day. In addition to this, Isaiah tells us that the very thresholds of the temple shook!**

**Around the throne of God, these "fiery angels," WHICH IS WHAT THE WORD "SERAPHIM" MEANS were flying around the throne of God. This is the only place that these magnificent creatures are mentioned in the whole Bible!**

**Each had six wings; and they used two of their wings to cover their faces--SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT BECOME TOTALLY BLINDED THEMSELVES BY THE GLORY OF GOD.**

**With two wings they covered their feet; though there are many Hebrew scholars today who suggest that these angels were using two of their wings to cover their "private parts" -- as an outward sign of the deep sense of humility each of them, were experiencing in the presence of God.**

**With two of their wings they were totally flying around the throne of God! And they were singing antiphonally --- back and forth -- like people singing in a chorus, or the members of a choir singing a "round": "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"**

**Friends, as I was studying the words of our Old Testament lesson for this morning, I couldn't help but wonder how people in our nation might answer that same question today: "WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT GOD, WHAT DO YOU SEE?"**

**If there ever was a time when most Americans lived with a healthy amount of true fear and love for the LORD God, isn't it possible, someone has suggested, that now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the spiritual pendulum has swung back in the totally opposite direction?**

**We live in an age that has been classified by sociologists as the age of MORAL RELATIVISM. Anything goes! We live in an age when many more people tend to think of Almighty God as One who could now be closely akin to Santa Claus, at yet at the same time, strangely enough, unlike Santa Claus, the LORD God Almighty no longer**

cares whether or not you and I are naughty or nice! Their perception of God is simply that of a God who winks at sin and giggles at their iniquity.

**Their conception of God is that he is “far too loving to let anyone go to hell!”**

But, this certainly isn't the Prophet Isaiah's initial reaction, to his close encounter with the divine presence of God, when **God first called upon him to become a prophet to the nations is it!?!**

**If you were to read the first five chapters of the Book of Isaiah, it would become abundantly clear to you that the Prophet Isaiah functioned both as a preacher, but also very much like that kind of a divine “whistleblower” today!**

**God was angry with the people of Judah, largely because of their great indifference towards him.** Already in the first chapter of Isaiah, we hear this prophet, this divine whistleblower, saying such things as: ***“The LORD has spoken: ‘Children I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me! The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know me! My people do not understand’ (Isaiah 1:2-3)!***

But even among all the many harsh statements of judgment that God had given the Prophet Isaiah to pronounce upon his people, **there are also those tender moments when Isaiah's sermons are highly reflective of the great glimmers of God's hope and grace; the light of God's redemption that God gave Isaiah to shine directly upon the paths of his disobedient people.** -- In Isaiah 1:18-20 we read that God, speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, has these tender words of his mercy to share with his chosen people: ***“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD; though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow! Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land! But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it!”***

**The fact that Isaiah tells us that he was first called upon by God to become a prophet in the year that King Uzziah died is highly significant.** For the most part, Uzziah was a good king, and he reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah for 52 years! That's a long time! Just stop and think that in the last 52 years 10 different presidents and their families have lived in the White House: beginning with President Kennedy, then President Johnson, President Nixon, President Ford, President Carter, President Bush, President Clinton, President Bush, President Obama and now President Trump.

Concern over the continuance of peace and prosperity following the death of Uzziah created a climate of anxiety all throughout Judah. **And it was in this context that Isaiah accepted God's challenge for him to become God's own prophetic spokesman to his people in a somewhat similar way, if you don't mind me saying it, that the Chief Correspondent of the White House; a woman named Sarah Huckabee Sanders, serves as the chief spokesperson for President Trump today!**

Because of the **VISION THAT GOD IMPARTED TO ISAIAH, ISAIAH BECAME A MAN WITH A MESSAGE OF HOPE! WHEN EVERYONE ELSE COULD ONLY EXPERIENCE A GREAT CAUSE FOR DESPAIR, DISCOURAGEMENT, DISILLUSIONMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENT FOR THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH, Isaiah instead SAW THE KING! Not the new King Ahaz, who was a wicked king, but a divine KING! One was a mortal king! The OTHER WAS AN IMMORTAL KING! One was a human king! The other was one was a heavenly King.** One king had died as all kings

do! The other **King, however, lives forever as no OTHER KING HAS OR EVER COULD!**

Notice carefully how he sees the Lord. He does not see the Lord pacing back and forth, wringing his hands, barking out orders, breaking out into a cold sweat because King Uzziah had died. **When Isaiah saw the Lord, he was: "sitting on a throne, high and lifted up."**

Isaiah saw clearly what we need to see completely in these difficult days in which we live, and that is God is on the throne. His hand is on the throttle. He is high and lifted-up above every ruler, every circumstance, every condition, every problem, every difficulty, and He is in absolute complete control.

Now immediately after Isaiah gets a real glimpse of the real God, however, we read of the dramatic reaction of Isaiah: *"Then I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.'" (v.5)*

When Isaiah saw the Lord in his holiness, he saw himself in his sinfulness, and the people in their wickedness. **Now up until this time, Isaiah had been working overtime pointing the finger at other people, condemning the sins of others. If you go back to chapter five you will see in verses 8, 11, 18, 20, 21 & 22, he is giving "woes" to everybody else.** But when he sees the Lord he says, *"Woe is me, for I am undone!"*

**When Isaiah saw God in his holiness, he saw himself in his sinfulness.** When his soul was placed against the bright pure holiness of God, his white became black, his right became wrong, his might became weak. **Until you see God as He really is, you will never see you as you really are. Until you meet God, you will never know that your biggest problem is you.**

I heard about a fellow who woke up feeling like one big GAPING WOUND. He immediately went to his doctor's office and said, "Doctor, everywhere I touch it hurts. I touch my left shoulder it hurts. I touch my right shoulder it hurts. I touch my left leg it hurts. I touch my head it hurts. I touch my chest it hurts. I touch my foot it hurts. Everywhere I touch it hurts. Am I dying?" After a quick examination, the doctor said, **"I know what your problem is-your right index finger is broken."** Just like this most insightful doctor, only God can truly tell us what is wrong with you and me, and what is wrong with you and me, is THE SAME THING THAT IS WRONG WITH THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE---SIN. **Once you see God in His glory then you will see your guilt, and you will understand His grace.**

Two men were traveling on a train and one man introduced himself as a preacher. **The other man said, "Well, since you are a preacher I want to ask you a question. How can a God of love send a man to hell?"**

The preacher said, **"Let me answer your question with a greater question-'How can a God of holiness take a sinner to heaven?'"**

Of all the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah is given a clearest vision of the Promised Messiah and what he would be like: *"Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows! And yet we esteemed him not; stricken, smitten and afflicted with God! But he was wounded for our transgressions; wounded for our iniquities and the chastisement that was upon him has brought us peace!"*

God had exposed Isaiah sin. Isaiah refused to excuse his sin, and because of that he was made right with God. For one of the seraphim flew to the altar and removed from it a hot coal of fire! And of that angel we read in **verse 7**: *"And he touched my mouth with it and said: 'Behold this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.'" (v.7)* Now why the lips? Isaiah himself had emphasized that his lips, and the lips of his people, were unclean. Why because his heart was sin and shame too.

Do you remember what Jesus said one day? ***“There is nothing outside of a person that, by going into him, can defile him. But the things that come out of a person are what defile him! For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within and they defile a person” (Mark 7:15, 21-23)!***

Once Isaiah became clean with God in acknowledging his own sin, Isaiah was made clean. When Isaiah confessed his sin, God cleansed his sin. 1 Jn. 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Now immediately after the cleansing comes the calling: ***“Also, I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’” (v.8)*** God does not demand a perfect vessel, but He does demand a clean vessel. After the cleansing came the calling, and after the calling came the commitment: ***“Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me” (v.8b)!***

**Isaiah did not hesitate, he did not equivocate, he stepped right up to the front and said, *“Here am I! Send me.”* Through the shed blood of Jesus upon the cross we too may now know the joy of our God being a Holy God, but of us, his people to also be a holy people! AMEN**