

READING Isaiah 6: 1- 8

SERMON

A Vision of God's Glory

I remember being with our younger daughter once and seeing her, as a mental health nurse, performing a mini-mental test, just to check a patient's condition. Questions were asked like:

- Who is the Prime Minister of Britain?
- Can you spell the word 'world' backwards? – I thought that is a little difficult for the dyslexics!
- How long has the Queen been on the throne – if ever I was in that situation I have my answer already lined up – I would just say my age. I was born the year the Queen came to the throne. It has been a long reign, even longer than King Uzziah whom we heard about in our reading.

King Uzziah reigned for some fifty-two years. By and large it was a good reign although he finished his years off as a leper because of pride that made him presumptuous. This is part of the reason why Isaiah 6, our reading today began

“In the year that King Uzziah died...” (Isaiah 6:1 NIV)

Yes, it gives a date, but it is also to contrast the great, but flawed King Uzziah with the majesty of God. We have this great and glorious picture of God

- His Majesty – he is seated on a throne. His garment has a long flowing train meaning royalty and opulence.
- High and Exalted – he is above manipulation. Human beings can be manipulated, but not God. He sees to the very heart and he is above all things and so cannot be got at.

Then we see the seraphs or seraphim (depending on whether you are a language purist or not) flying around praising God, worshipping God, reminding Isaiah of

- His holiness – Holy, holy, holy. Why three times. It can be because of the Trinity, the fact that God is Three in One and One in Three, or it may be from the thought that God is holy in heaven, in the present world and in the world to come. Both ideas work, and both speak of his holiness, unlike Uzziah of whom we read

“But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honoured by the LORD God."

Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead.” (2 Chronicles 26:16-19 NIV)

Uzziah had thought he was better than God and even his good act was his downfall because of pride – his power has gone to his head. No such thing happens with God

- Lord Almighty – his splendour, his magnificence. All of that is tied in those two words. To us it is just two words, but they are full of meaning reminding people that God is Yahweh, the name too holy, too powerful to be mentioned – that God is the great one, the mighty one – the one over all, the powerful one.

And then the second half of what they say is very reminiscent of the first half of Psalm 19 which Dayo brought to last Sunday morning and which begins

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”
(Psalms 19:1 NIV)

Then we read of the shaking, the noise, the smoke – all adding to this atmosphere of magnificence, of splendour, of his nobility and power.

And Isaiah is in the presence of all this and he may be remembering that Uzziah tried to only worship God in the Temple and it was a dangerous thing – Uzziah developed leprosy there and then. This was scary. So Isaiah speaks

““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.”” (Isaiah 6:5 NIV)

Notice what he says

““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.”” (Isaiah 6:5 NIV)

Isaiah is the good guy in all this. The first five chapters of Isaiah have been talking about the sins of the nation and Isaiah could have so easily distanced himself from that. However he is standing in front of God and all he can see is that he has sinned and is not worthy to be there. The description of God is holy and majestic and glorious and Isaiah talks about himself as one who is in ruin, of being unclean, of living among an unclean people. He includes himself in with the people that have been condemned in the first five chapters of the book because he knows that with God, there is just sin, not degrees of sin, just sin.

Look at the person next to you. Do it with a sideways glance, surreptitiously. Often when we do that we compare. I’m better than that person because On the streets we might say, ‘I’m better than that drunk coming out of Faces because I never get drunk.’ But we, all of us, still sin and so should be like Isaiah and be confessing our sins to God, regularly. If you have no sin to confess, ever, then you are either kidding yourself or.....dead.

So there is Isaiah, in this magnificent scene, in front of God, feeling so unworthy. This is a dangerous place to be. For Uzziah it meant leprosy until the day of his death – what would it mean for Isaiah?

“Then one of the seraphs 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.””
(Isaiah 6:6-7 NIV)

I bet that has got to hurt – having a live coal touch the lips. I wonder what he thought as the seraph came toward him with the coal in his hand.

In the movies if a sidekick of the main bad guy comes towards a victim with a hot coal – you know it is not going to be good news for the victim, unless of course, if the victim is Steven Seagal or Jean-Claude Van Damme who will Kung-Fu everyone in sight and escape. With Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone of course they will shoot everyone they see to get out of it.

Isaiah just had to stand there, no escape, and wait and the coal touched his lips. That had to hurt, but at times getting rid of sin can be painful. Breaking a habit can be hard and painful, but note that there came forgiveness. We can know forgiveness, but it still can be a painful process to go through. During this coming week Sue, Darren and myself will be on the prayer team at Leading Edge and we may hear some stories of pain, some may be because of the sin of people, even those coming for prayer..

So Isaiah is cleansed, he is in the presence of God. You get the impression he is there all alone, we read of no-one else with him and he hears this voice say

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" ...” (Isaiah 6:8 NIV)

What is he going to say? We might say, “Great Lord, send this person next to me.” Or we might have the thought that I read this week

Many folks want to serve God.....but only as advisors!

But Isaiah really has no option but to say, after looking around for any other volunteers in a empty room apart from him, God and the angels and himself

“... "Here am I. Send me!"” (Isaiah 6:8 NIV)

And God said

“..."Go and tell this people..."” (Isaiah 6:9 NIV)

You’ve have thought that the place for Isaiah was to stay with God. He had been given such a picture of God, he had been cleansed and forgiven by God, why not stay there and worship God? He was now worthy to do that surely. What a privilege. But God says ‘Go and tell’ and he says that today to us, ‘Go and tell’. We are to take the Christian message to our friends, our relatives, our workmates, our neighbours. We are to tell them of our relationship with God and what he means to us.

A great time with God is not a reason to have even more time with God, but to take what you have learnt to a needy world out there.