

In this morning's text, we read of Isaiah's grand vision: God is beyond comprehension. God is SO big that this deity has a hemline several stories tall. And there's a host of helpers, too. There are great winged creatures, adept at multi-tasking, and when they speak, their voices thunder, and the ground shakes. There is smoke, and fire, and heat, and incomprehensible glory. And there is something SO pure, SO refined it can burn away our shortcomings, align our hearts with a better purpose.

And we receive this text on Trinity Sunday, that day in which we proclaim God's likeness to that of the recycling arrows, this presence that is Parent, Child, and Spirit all at once, and yet also distinct. This fluidity, this symmetry, this neatness is so succinct, and yet it's still a fleeting, clumsy attempt to describe an infinite and remarkable phenomenon.

I'm gonna wager that some of you take great comfort in the vastness of Isaiah's vision, and in the geometry of our early Church leaders. And still others of you might feel an urge to dismiss strange visions or an insistence on categorizing the divine.

Well let me say, my aim in reading today's text is not to define your vision or understanding of the Godhead. Perhaps for you, God is indeed that friend named Jesus in the garden; perhaps for you, God is some indescribable entity; perhaps for you, the metaphor is ever-changing. I think you ought to stick with the image that brings you a sense of connection; an image that reaches into your heart and stirs your soul; an image that reinforces your value and worth as God's created and beloved children. That image or set of images is different for everyone, and that's a beautiful and wonderful and healthy and normal thing. Because we're all different people!

But what I would ask you to do today, in listening to Isaiah, is not to read this text as THE description of God. Love the image, hate the image, be indifferent. Same goes for the Trinity. Set aside your resonance or lack of resonance with these images, and instead, ask yourself what the people who offer such images are trying to convey about God.

I believe that both the mighty God of Isaiah's vision, and the Trinitarian God that emerges years later, are both an attempt to express the unparalleled holiness of our Creator. I would add the caveat that such descriptors can and should always be improved and expanded to reflect the diversity of God's creation, and God's uncompromising love for all created beings. Therefore, expressions and metaphors for God will look different in every generation.

But this holiness idea, even if it may need some polishing, is striking to me. Isaiah has this vision in the wake of King Uzziah's death. The king, by all accounts, God's chosen leader, ought to be a symbol of all that is holy and righteous. And yet, Uzziah, and so many kings before him and after him, forsake all that is holy and righteous in pursuit of false security. Uzziah reigned for more than forty years, but eventually, it was his pride that did him in. Ahaz, who followed, fell victim to poor alliances.

Sure, Isaiah's vision and theology may be a bit too providential for your taste, but don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Isaiah understood God as the holiest of entities. And as long as people and God remained in righteous covenant, God, the holy entity, would reside in the Temple. And it was God's presence that guaranteed the long-term security and viability of God's people.

But for men like Uzziah and Ahaz, living righteously, trusting God's presence, wasn't enough. So the kings made alliances with super-powers and neighboring clans to protect Judah from the advances of Assyria, and other enemies that might one day follow.

So in this vision, Isaiah sees side by side, what is holy and what is not. And Isaiah resolves himself to be a messenger, a servant, a believer in the holiest of entities.

And I got to thinking about this idea of righteousness and holiness. The scriptures tell us that God gave us Torah, that's the Ten Commandments and the lesser laws that follow. Torah, as I understand it, was created to do two things: 1) to protect everyone's life force and 2) to encourage behaviors, choices, attitudes, etc. that would promote the wellbeing of everyone's life force.

So, if indeed, a people actually lived in covenant, those within Judah's boundaries would have access to needed resources, would have right relationship with neighbor, land, and maker, would live in a system that easily and healthily resolved disputes. And in such an environment, volatility is reduced; fear of invasion is reduced; trust in neighbor is increased. I think that's the kind of world where spears are eventually bent back into plowshares.

In Isaiah's passage, what I hear the Holy One telling him is this:

It's not speaking or claiming God's righteousness that makes us secure. It's not lording our righteousness via demonstrations of power that makes us secure. It's not alliances with earthly entities that makes us secure. It's the living into God's righteousness that makes us secure. And I'm asking you to proclaim to your

neighbors that it's the long, tedious, time-intensive work of relationship-building that's gonna liberate and secure your future.

And you know what's crazy? Humanity has been ignoring Isaiah's vision for 2,500 hundred years. As we speak, rockets are being launched back and forth over the very space Isaiah understood God to occupy. That's happening, because time and again humanity chooses to believe force rather than cooperation will lead to peace and stability. What need is there to live out Torah if you worship under an iron dome? What faith is there to exude if it's propped up on the falsity of isms? What jubilee can be cultivated if there is no space nor neighbor to share it with?

Maybe sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes, we need to see grand, audacious, incomprehensible visions like Isaiah's in order to believe that our God is bigger than the smallness of this world. Is there a power bigger than nuclear codes? Is there a power bigger than racism? Is there a power bigger than corporate interests? Is there a power bigger than apathy? I think there is. I believe there is. I know there is. It's the love of our Creator. And we need to be inventive, imaginative, and bold in envisioning God's possibilities in the midst of so many false certainties.

Isaiah stands in the midst of a terrifying (in every sense of the word) presence – one that is SO holy, SO pure, SO marvelous, it stretched the limits of his imagination. And this divine presence told Isaiah that security, peace, a future was only possible if it was apart from the predictable power grabs and idol-worshipping of the ruling class. And he says, "Here I am, Lord, send me!"

Well, Sardis, I think we know what's holy, too. For we have experienced the creative breath of a parenting God, and the manifested love of the

That's One Way to See It
Bob Stillerman
Trinity Sunday, 5/30/2021
Isaiah 6:1-8



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

living Jesus, and the swirling, whirling provocations of the Spirit. And while we may not have messed with hot coals, or seen something as outrageous as seraphs, we too, have an inkling of how to build the beloved community: at our tables, in our expressions of empathy and love for others, in our work to value relationships over transactions. And I pray that we have the resolve and the openness to see God in new spaces, and to respond with the same fervor as Isaiah in pursuing the work that is set apart from the world. Help us see you, God. And when we see you, please let us respond, "Here we are; send us, too."

May it be so, and may it be soon! Amen.