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Isaiah 6:1-8
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“Loved and Sent”

God’s grace and peace...

Tomorrow is Pastor Tom’s #71 birthday. In honor of him and his momentous day, I think we should just go ahead and all take the day off! Before he left for vacation, Pastor Tom had shared with me this book called *Loved and Sent*, written by a sixth generation Lutheran pastor, Jeff Cloeter, who serves Christ Memorial Lutheran Church in St. Louis. Pastor Tom will be using this book for a new class this summer once he gets back. So what do you get a guy for his birthday who already has everything? Answer: free publicity for his Sunday School class!

From the back cover: “I’ve come to know who I am in two words. They guide everything that I believe, think and do. I am loved by God in Jesus. I am sent by God into the world.” So loved and sent. That’s our identity and purpose. This is who we are. This is why we’re here. “You are loved more than you can imagine and sent with more purpose than you thought.” Some other lines I liked: “The only way to love like Jesus is to first be loved....Only those who are loved are capable of loving.” (p. 134). “The concept of sending says more about its originator than the object.” (p. 163)

Sounds like a good way to understand and live life as God's people! But of course the concept of loving and sending is nothing new. It is, in a very fundamental way, a reflection on the character and activity of God. And since this is Trinity Sunday, let's think of how God is seen at work. God is love, (1 John), perfect love. He is abiding in love. The Father says, "This is my Son whom I love." The Son says, "I love the Father." The Spirit, as one of my profs once put it, the Spirit is love. (Rom. 5:5; 15:30).

And as for the sending, the Father is the sending one, who sends the Son. The Spirit is also sent. The Son sends the Spirit from the Father. I might feel like we're going in circles. But that's just the Triune God at work for you and me. What we can say is that God is in relationship within Himself as the 3-in-1. And this relational God seeks relationship with people. It doesn't just happen because as you know we have a holy God and we are sinful people so God has to provide a way for us to dwell in His presence which is the cross.

The text for today is Isaiah 6, the vision of the Holy God who is enthroned, high and lifted up. We've got two seraphim flying around. This is the only mention of them in all of Old Testament. All I can tell you is that they are there in service to God and they are calling to each other. They are saying:

Qadosh, qadosh, qadosh

That's not the sound of your new washing machine. This is high-church Hebrew. It means "holy, holy, holy". While the three-fold repetition may be for emphasis, it may also be because of the Triune nature of God. That's why we have this reading today. Later on when God starts talking (v. 8), He asks the question. "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" *I and for us?* That kind of talk would seem to indicate God is talking to Himself—this is Trinitarian dialogue, not unlike Genesis 1 where God says, "Let us make man in our own image." The point is, God talks this way because He is this way—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the Trinity may be many things—complex, confusing, conundrum. But let me tell you something, the Trinity is not a problem to be solved or figured out. The Trinity is divinity on display and an invitation to press into the mystery. The Trinity above all, is holy. So the seraphim declare, "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory!" The whole of the temple shakes and sways at the sound of God calling. There is smoke—whether that's from the altar or a sacrifice, through this vision, Isaiah is in the presence of God. His glory is on display.

But because Isaiah is a sinful person, he knows this is not good. Sinfulness cannot dwell in holiness. He says, “Woe to me! I am lost! I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips and I live in a land of unclean people because I have seen King Yahweh!” Keep in mind this is a vision, so for that objection that no one can see God and live...this isn't a physical vision, but a spiritual one. What Isaiah just acknowledged is that he is unfit to worship and so is the nation of Israel. The nation was meant to be a servant of Yahweh, but they failed to live up to that standard. They needed forgiveness too.

Before a holy God, no one can stand. And yet, we stroll in each Sunday—and we just want people to feel welcome. Our God is still holy. How can we come before Him? In humility, in recognition of what He provides.

Do you know the person who is able to worship God the best? What makes for the best, the highest form of worship? When I was in high school, I was riding to Camp Perkins with Pastor Tim Pauls who picked me up from the airport. And he wanted me to tell him what the best way to worship God was. So I said, “Praising Him.” “No, we should do that, but that's not it.” Reading the Word, sharing the Gospel, doing good works...I went down the list and every answer was no, no, no. Well, that kinda lengthened the car ride. Finally he told me. The highest form of worship, according to the Lutheran Confessions, is the seeking

and receiving of the forgiveness of sin. Why? Because this exalts God as who He is—the God who saves. It's the person who has had his or her sins forgiven that loves God the most and has the most to believe in Him for and trust Him for.

What we read in Isaiah 6 is really an example of confession and absolution. It's worship. It's divine service. Because Isaiah makes that confession and instantly, God moves into absolution mode, serving Isaiah according to his desperate need. One of the seraphim flies to him with a burning hot coal from the altar. This coal is a means of grace. It conveys forgiveness through sacrifice and atonement. The seraphim touches the coal to Isaiah's mouth. Why there? Because Isaiah himself said he was a man of unclean lips. So it's appropriate and matching remedy but also keep in mind, Isaiah is to be a prophet. He needs cleansed lips for the cleansing Word.

“Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

It's absolution that is based on sacrificial atonement of sin. *A moment on the lips, the scale of justice tips.* Guilt is removed. Holiness is established. And now, just like that, we have an Isaiah who has experienced God's power and grace. He's a new man.

Soon thereafter, God asks a question. Which, in the midst of all the glory, God is asking a question? Well, it is rhetorical and it's a way of prompting Isaiah to speak up. The question is "Whom shall I send? Who shall go for us?" And Isaiah says, "Here am I! Send me." Having been loved, he is ready to be sent. Having received forgiveness, He's in a position to declare forgiveness to the nation of Israel. He's qualified. He knows how God has served him. He is ready to go and serve others. This is his commissioning.

"Only when a man has been convicted of sin and has understood that the Redeemer has borne the guilt of his sin is he willing and ready to joyfully serve God, to go wherever God may call him" (Edward J. Young, Isaiah Commentary, vol. 1, 254). Every act of service should reflect and be rooted in how God has already served us by loving us, sending His Son and His Spirit.

How does someone go from "Woe is me!" to "Here am I! Send me"? What has to happen? Jesus has to happen. As Isaiah found out in his vision, a sinful person cannot be in the presence of a holy God. Isaiah's atonement came from a burning coal. Our atonement comes from the cross. As soon as God forgave Isaiah, God sent him. That's still the pattern for God's people today who are loved, forgiven and sent into the world. What I want you to see is that is not a rare or unique behavior on God's part. This is what He does all the time. This is

what He wants to do with you! Having loved you, He sends you. But it all starts with that moment of repentance. If you want the wow, start with woe and then see what God does from there. Actually repent, trust God, and then see what He establishes from there.

One of my favorite theologians, Frederick Buechner, observed, "To repent is to come to your senses. It is not so much something you do as something that happens. True repentance spends less time looking at the past and saying, 'I'm sorry,' than to the future and saying, 'Wow!'" That's the move Isaiah made— from woe to wow! And that's the move we get to make too.

In Jesus' name, Amen.