

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, 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. "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." 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." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8 SS 6/3/12 E. Bay 5/31/15 Trinity Sunday Ro.
8:14-17 Jn. 3:1-17 Ps. 33

Athanasian Creed; Hymns: 4, 239, 246, 244

THE HOLY GOD CLEANSSES US FROM OUR SINS

Dear fellow believers in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

In the verses before our text the Lord says, *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.... Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, ... who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. ... For they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the Word of the Holy One of Israel"* (Isaiah 5:20a, 21a, 23, 24c). God was talking about people who lived about 3,000 years ago. How accurately God's words describe our world today! More and more people are losing

any idea of what it means to fear God – to hold God in awe and reverence. But as the Old Testament prophet Isaiah reminds us on this Trinity Sunday, God is holy, we are sinful, and we need the holy God to cleanse us from our sins.

Isaiah was given a vision: *“I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple.”* John informs us in the twelfth chapter of his Gospel that Isaiah’s awesome vision was of Jesus sitting on His throne in heaven (John 12:37-41). *“Above Him were seraphs”* (special angels mentioned only here in the Bible) *“each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet”* (in humility before the holy, almighty God), *“and with two they were flying.”*

“And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty.’” *“Holy”* is spoken three times, one each for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We know this because in the last verse of our text when God speaks He refers to Himself as *“Us.”* It reminds us of the first chapter of John’s Gospel and the first chapter of Genesis. There we see God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together at Creation saying, *“Let Us make man....”*

“Holy” is emphasized in the original Hebrew text. It stresses what Isaiah and even the seraphs, the heavenly angels, felt as they humbled themselves in the presence of the holy God. The word *“Holy”* in the original expresses the idea of *“separateness”* or *“unapproachableness,”* contrasting the holy God and, in Isaiah’s case, sinful man. The seventh chapter of Hebrews describes Jesus as being *“holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners”* (v 26b). God is separate from sin and all things corrupted by sin. It has become popular to glorify, and for some people, even worship *“Mother Earth.”* We should treat the creation with respect. But God says in the first chapter of Romans that people are *“fools”* when they *“worship and serve created things rather than the Creator”* (vv 21-25).

God says about all people by our nature, *“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God”* (Isaiah 59:2). As Moses stood before God who was in the burning bush, God commanded him, *“Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”* We’re told, *“Then*

Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:1ff.).

Moses, a sinful human being, was in the presence of the holy, righteous, almighty God!

The psalmist says, *“Let all the earth fear the Lord.”* He then explains what it means to fear the Lord: *“Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him”* (33:8). That is the attitude **everyone** should have before God. Today, the opposite has become true. Society is **‘in God’s face’** – thinking and believing and living in open defiance of God and His Word. Why is this happening? The devil is at the bottom of it, and he’s really having his way with society. Scripture perfectly describes the attitude of so many people today: *“There is no fear of God before their eyes”* (Ro. 3:18). Scripture warns, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap”* (Galatians 6:7). *“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews. 10:31).

In Isaiah’s vision of Jesus on His heavenly throne the angels cried out to one another, *“The whole earth is full of [God’s] glory.”* As we witness the beauty and the complexity and the order of the creation all around us, it is clear that there is a God who created it all and holds everything together. There’s no way all this could have come into being on its own, by chance. As we confess in the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed, **“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”!**

As Isaiah saw this vision of Jesus on His throne and heard the voices of the angels, he cried out, *“Woe to me!” ... “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 felt his sinfulness very keenly as he stood before the holy God. Once Jesus gave Peter and some of the other disciples a miraculous catch of fish. As Peter witnessed Christ’s divine power, he felt the way Isaiah had in God’s presence. We’re told Peter *“fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’”* (Luke 5:8).

After Isaiah confessed his sinfulness before the holy God, he reports, *“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 had confessed his sin to God, and God forgave him. Fire is sometimes used to purify, as in the refining of gold where the base materials are separated from what then becomes pure gold. When the coal was touched to Isaiah’s lips he was told, *“Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”* This was a vision, so no burning coal actually touched his lips. But the vision illustrated a truth. The coal represents the Gospel, since it is the Gospel’s message of forgiveness in God’s Son that purifies us from our sin. Isaiah knew he was a sinner, and that made him afraid to come before the holy God. But when he was assured in the vision of the coal that God had cleansed him of his sins, Isaiah was no longer afraid to come to Him.

Jesus once told those who were blind to their own sinfulness, *“It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners”* (Mark 2:17). Today there is so much disrespect and defiance toward God. Society has lost its sense of shame. The world (and sadly, many so-called Christian churches!) have dropped the word “sin” from their vocabulary. Their wrongdoings are the fault of someone else, or some bad experience they had or their genetic makeup. Better yet, they think, their wrongdoings aren’t wrong after all, not these days! They tell us they don’t need to be bound by any ‘outdated’ morals of a ‘few religious extremists.’ If we don’t realize our sinfulness and confess our sin-sickness before our Heavenly Physician, we can receive no forgiveness and cleansing and healing from Him. Scripture warns us, *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... We make God a liar”* (1 John 1:8, 10a).

God has to humble us before Him, as He did with Isaiah, so that we understand right from wrong, and see the sin in ourselves, and repent of it. The Bible says, *“If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). God’s Son, Jesus Christ, took the sins of the whole world upon Himself. He paid for all of our sins with His suffering and death on the cross. By faith in the Savior who was to come, Isaiah could come before God without fear. By faith in the Savior who has come, so can we. The writer to the Hebrews assures all who are in Christ, *“Let us therefore*

draw near with boldness” (“confidence”) to [God’s] throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16).

After God had assured Isaiah that He had cleansed him of his sin, Isaiah says, *“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”* By faith Isaiah knew the living God. He knew that, like us all, he was a wretched, helpless sinner. But with the psalmist Isaiah praised God, *“There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared”* (Psalm 130:4). We sinners stand in awe of God’s amazing grace and forgiveness! Isaiah knew that God loved him and had forgiven him and saved him. When God called Isaiah to be His witness to proclaim this message before His people, Isaiah jumped at the opportunity.

Peter assures each one of us, *“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). We’re not religious fanatics when we stand up before the world and condemn sin for what it is. We’re not ‘holier than thou’ religious relics when we tell people what **God** says in His Word is right and wrong. The Son of God Himself told people, *“Repent”* (Matthew 4:17). Repent of what? Repent of **sin**. The world doesn’t understand it, but we refuse to be silenced out of love – love for God and love for them. We don’t like to see them having all the problems they’re causing themselves in their lives. Much more than that, we know they’re headed for hell, and we want them to go to heaven. The holy God says, *“As I live ..., I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die?”* (Ezekiel 33:11). Our hope is that people will repent. Then we can assure them, *“Jesus forgives me. I know Jesus forgives you, too.”*

*If you cannot speak like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say He died for all. (TLH
#496:2a)*

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty.” We understand our sinfulness before the holy God. God has forgiven us and cleansed us

from all of our sins for Jesus' sake. Christian friends, think of the God we serve. Think of the world's need for Him. Think of what we have to offer them in the Gospel of Jesus Christ! As with Isaiah, so with each of us as His people the Triune God asks, *"Who will go for Us?" "Here am I,"* Lord, I also want to be Your witness, that all people may come to know You as their holy God and Savior! Amen.