

Bible Tuesday for the fifth Sunday of Epiphany, 2019

Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple. Seraphs stood in attendance on Him. Each of them had six wings; with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their legs, and with two they would fly. And one would call to the other, "Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of Hosts! His presence fills all the earth!" The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the house kept filling up with smoke. I cried, "Woe is me; I am lost! For I am a man of unclean lips and lie among a people of unclean lips; yet my own eyes have held the King Lord of Hosts!"

Then one of the seraphs flew over to me and with a live coal which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched it to my lips and declared, "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt shall depart and your sin be purged away."

Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And I answered, "Here am I; send me!" And He said, "Go, say to that people: 'Hear indeed, but do not understand; See, indeed, but do not grasp.' Dull that people's mind, stop its ears, and seal its eyes—Lest, seeing with its eyes and hearing with its ears, it also grasps with its mind and repents and saves itself."

I asked, "How long, my Lord?" And He replied, "Till towns lie waste without inhabitants and houses without people, and the ground lies waste and desolate—for the Lord will banish the population—and deserted sites are many in the midst of the land. But while a tenth part yet remains in it, it shall repent. It shall be ravaged like the terebinth and the oak, of which stumps are left even when they are felled: its stump shall be a holy seed."

King Uzziah's death inaugurates a new era in Isaiah's prophetic career. There is new urgency in the prophet's proclamation as the Babylonians are exerting more military might over Canaan. Isaiah has the awesome privilege of seeing God in his heavenly throne room.

Seraphs – In Isaiah these beings are human-like with three pairs of wings. Even though they are heavenly beings, nevertheless they are not perfect enough to exist fully in the presence of God. Rather they shield their eyes and modestly hide their groins and thighs before God, even as they call out God's praises. Seraphs are also described in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation. The hymn of the seraphs in this verse is the center of the "Amidah", a prayer prayed both liturgically and personally by faithful Jews to this day.

Isaiah describes this throne room as unable to contain God; his mere clothes fill the room and his being rattles the doorposts. Indeed, the seraphs proclaim that God's presence not only fills the throne room but spills out onto and fills all the earth.

The Hebrew Scriptures describe in several places God's perfection and the inability of the imperfect to exist in God's presence. The prophet Isaiah knows the Law of Abraham and knows how far short of fulfilling it he falls...but he has *seen God!* "Not only are my lips

unclean but everyone I have ever known is unclean!" Isaiah fears he will be obliterated. But one touch of a hot coal from the heavenly altar changes his fear to courage.

The prophecy given to Isaiah is one of severe rebuke: the time for Judah to repent has past. The judgement of God is upon Judah. The Babylonian army is on its way. Yet, God desires repentance and, for the sake of a penitent 10%, God will regenerate Israel and Judah after their captivity in and under Babylonia.

Psalm 138

I praise You with my whole heart, sing a hymn to You before the divine beings;
I bow toward Your holy temple and praise Your name for Your steadfast love and faithfulness, because You have exalted Your name, Your word, above all.
When I called, You answered me, You inspired me with courage.
All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, for they have heard the words You spoke.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, "Great is the majesty of the Lord!"
High though the Lord is, He sees the lowly; lofty, He perceives from afar.
Though I walk among enemies, You preserve me in the face of my foes; You extend Your hand; with Your right hand You deliver me.
The Lord will settle accounts for me.
O Lord, Your steadfast love is eternal; do not forsake the work of Your hands.

Even as most psalms move from petition to praise, so does the entire psalter. This is the first of the praise hymns which conclude the book of Psalms.

Note those concepts which modern Christians do not tend to include in our system of beliefs:

- There are other divine beings beside God! Ancient Israelites believed that other gods and goddesses existed but that they were far less than Yahweh/God. In some Hebrew Scriptures, one gets the impression some Israelites saw God has rather like Zeus, the head of a whole host of gods.
- The faithful bow toward the Temple when praying to God. We tend to assign this kind of piety to Muslims, who face Mecca when praying. However, ancient Israelites did believe the Temple on Mount Zion was God's footstool. It stands to reason that ancient personal piety would dictate facing Temple.

In the fourth line, the psalmist proclaims that all the world's governments will adore God "because of the words You spoke." God's wisdom and God's love conveyed in God's teachings are inescapable.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

I would recommend you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which you also stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brother and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

As we read and study the books of 1 & 2 Corinthians, it is easy to forget that these are a compilation of one side of correspondence between the apostle, Paul and a mixed and conflicted congregation in Corinth. Paul's sometime strident writing takes its tone in response to the now lost letters of question from this congregation.

In the above writing, Paul reminds this congregation of the very center of Christianity, that Jesus was executed for human sin, died, was buried, but actually raised from the dead. What is the proof? The eye witness accounts of all those Paul lists who saw the risen Jesus, scars and all, with their own eyes.

The Corinthian congregation was accustomed to fantastic stories of gods and goddesses, virgin births, and miracle workers. Even more, the religious cults of Rome had grand temples with gold statues, huge idols several stories high which had smoke coming out of their noses and mouths, oracle givers, and omens. Christianity offered none of that, only a human who was also God, who lived a servant life, died an excruciating death, was buried in a borrowed grave, and *rose from the dead!*

Paul gives further credence to this gospel by describing himself, not as one to be worshiped, but rather as one to be pitied. Paul was a very young man as Christianity was just starting, trained as a Pharisee, and zealously persecuted early Christians because he saw them as heretics leading faithful Jews astray. All that made a dramatic 180 when Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus where he intended to arrest and torture more Christians. In this letter, Paul finds himself addressing the very people Pharisees hate, rich Roman gentiles, with the gospel of Jesus unconditional love for them.

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the

fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

While Luke follows Mark's gospel and parallels Matthew's gospel closely, this passage deviates from both significantly. In Luke 4, Jesus is visiting Peter's family. No disciples have been called but Jesus is at Peter's house nonetheless and heals Peter's mother-in-law. Then Jesus heals all the sick in Capernaum. In this passage, the healing morphs into teaching.

Lake of Gennesaret is another name for the Sea of Galilee. Despite Simon having just come in from a long night of fruitless fishing, Jesus conscripts him in order to use the fishing boat and water in as a dais and podium to address the growing, pressing crowd. The crowd merely listens to Jesus, while Peter obeys him.

When Jesus give the command, "Put out...let down your nets..." the "your" is plural. Are Peter's partners in the boat also? Peter responds not with "rabbi" or "Lord" or "teacher" but "Master". This is the only occurrence of this title for Jesus in the New Testament. It is a military and governmental term for a very high ranking commander. "If you say so..." is a rather weak translation of the Greek. A stronger and also viable translation is "Because you said this, I will do this." Peter has no hesitation in the Greek. Jesus spoke and Peter did.

Last week's gospel lesson told of the folks in Nazareth wanting to keep Jesus all to themselves, their own private golden egg laying goose; a sinful response to Jesus' ministry. In contrast, Luke tells us the story of Peter pleading, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Peter and his colleagues were amazed and terrified by what Jesus had just done.

"Do not be afraid! From now on you will be catching people." - the Greek could also be translated, "Don't continue to be afraid." I rather like this because fear is neither a sin nor disbelief. It is a reptilian brain response to things severely out of the ordinary. Jesus speaks to that fear by telling it to stop.

"From now on you will be catching people." - Greek "From now you shall be catching alive people." The word for catching is also used for being captive or being captivating. There is

a sense not of entrapment with the gospel but of luring and wooing. The King of Heaven coming near is to be captivating stuff.

No wonder the Peter, James, and John left their business, their coworkers, and followed Jesus. Jesus was, after all, staying at Peter's house. Jesus had also just brought in a week's salary by granting them such a huge catch. And Jesus gave them a whole new vocation, fishing for people, with the best lure there is...Jesus.