

5 Epiphany – Year C – February 10, 2010 - Homily
Isaiah 6:1-13; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11
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As soon as I read Isaiah's response to his vision of God, I couldn't help but think about Daniel Schutte's stirring song from *With One Voice*. The first verse is particularly appropriate: "I the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry. All who dwell in deepest sin my hand will save. I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright. Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send? Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart." It amply reflects Jesus' own life as Lord of all, and light of the world. As prophet, priest and King, Jesus' life enfolds and encircles all the lives of the prophets, including Isaiah's.

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines a prophet, in part, as "one who utters divinely inspired revelations." Isaiah's call is unique. Unlike Jeremiah, Isaiah experiences a vision of God in which he is immediately aware of his sinfulness, and the sinfulness of all the people. In the vision, he is then cleansed by the ministrations of God's heavenly attendants, and then eagerly offers himself in God's service. There are a few details that we ought to slow down and examine here.

The first is that Isaiah's vision of God, or in fancy terms, his theophany, is firmly rooted in history, occurring in the year that King Uzziah died. For all God's power and majesty, we repeatedly see how God works in and through the events of humanity and human history in the confines of time and space. Beyond the creation of our world, the most significant God-event on earth is, of course, the birth, life and death of our Lord Jesus, which is carefully placed into an historical context in the Gospel of Luke.

Isaiah paints us a picture of God's awe-inspiring presence, describing how the mere hem of God's robe fills the temple, and how all in attendance are worshiping God and saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." I hope that phrase sounds familiar. We speak or sing this *Sanctus* every time we celebrate Holy Communion, echoing the voices of all gathered around the Lord's throne in heaven, as we gather around the Lord's Table on earth. These words are full of power: drawing us into participation in heavenly worship, even as we remain on earth. We can hardly fail to notice that worship of God confirms God's holiness. Our own purpose on earth is to move towards that holiness, through our faith in Christ, and the transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit. The only other time we hear and read these words of heavenly worship is in John's Revelation. But first Peter (1 Peter 1:16) also reminds us, that it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Becoming holy is not something any of us can do for ourselves; it is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Yet even in the process of becoming, we are already set aside and consecrated by God for His service. Ultimately, holiness shines out in the day-to-day words and actions of our lives. Dwight L. Moody says it like this, "It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. Lighthouses do not ring bells... to call attention to their shining – they just shine."

Isaiah clearly did not feel very holy in God's presence. In his encounter with God, what shines out for Isaiah is his own sinfulness. His response is something like Simon Peter's, the overwhelming recognition of his own sinfulness in contrast to God's perfect

Goodness and Love. Isaiah proclaims that he is lost. In other translations, the word is undone or about to be destroyed. Like John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, you and I may speak of ourselves as having been lost, that is before accepting Christ into our lives. It conjures images of wandering alone in some kind of strange place without compass or purpose, of going astray, and of perishing without a trace. While those who are in that state often do not realize it, 'lost' is a perfect description of life without Christ, and all the more reason why we too are called to bear a prophetic word to the lost souls of the world. Given what is at stake here, I cannot believe for one instant that any one of us would want another human being to remain lost and alone, if we had the opportunity to guide them to the loving arms of God in Christ Jesus. It is a great privilege and one of Jesus' commandments to set others on the path and walk with them as fellow travelers on the road to holiness.

Perhaps another aspect of our meditations for this week is to consider what we might see if we turn God's light on in some of those darkened rooms of our hearts and minds that we have set aside, or temporarily sealed off. This is the season of epiphany, the season of God's revelation to the world, and a time to see things in a new light, the light of Christ's love. There is simply nothing we can do, or have done, that is unforgivable. It is pure pride to maintain that we are unforgivable. At best, that attitude says Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf is incomplete. At worst, it maintains that Jesus' death and resurrection are ineffective for the salvation of the whole world. Our baptismal covenant calls us to repent and return to the Lord when we sin. Isaiah is doing just that in our reading tonight, and he is receiving the same gift of God's gracious forgiveness, as you and I do through Christ. When Isaiah confesses his sins before the throne of God he receives cleansing, healing and forgiveness. In deference to the frailty of our humanity, God sends his seraphs to administer the means of grace to Isaiah through the touching of his lips. In deference to our humanity, God becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ to personally offer us the fullness of God's mercy and reconciliation to God through the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world.

God's amazing grace makes each of us ready to respond in faith and obedience to the work that God has prepared for you and for me to do. When we say, "Hear am I, send me!" we too are accepting our part in the Lord's Great Commission. "Co" because we do all things in and through the Lord's strength, and with the help and support of the Body of Christ. "Mission" because God's charge will always take us beyond self. When we offer ourselves to God in worship and in service, we must always remember that God is always present, and that God may show up in unexpected ways! Watch this week for all the surprising ways that God leads us to sing a new song in our hearts; speak a divinely inspired word; or shows up in a stranger or a strange place. Let's all ask the Lord to show us where the light is shining ahead, and help us to follow.

Amen.