

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

Some might take the words Isaiah speaks in our lesson today as a sign of a man suffering from low self-esteem or who is prone to extremes when we hear him cry out, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...." This phrase, "woe is me" that Isaiah uses is a passionate cry of grief and despair in Hebrew- like a miserable lamentation. And the Hebrew word for "unclean," in this context, is not so much a sense of ritual uncleanliness but of moral shortcoming. You might recall that St. Peter said something similar to Jesus after Jesus performed the miracle of fish in their fishing boat saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" This kind of talk in an age when admitting we're wrong or, worse, admitting we have failed in any way, can certainly fall strangely on our ears.

In both cases we're hearing from men who have just been stricken with a dose of extreme recognition- recognition of one's true nature juxtaposed against the holiness of God. More than just being dramatic or self-abnegating, these men are experiencing something like an instantaneous revelation of all their mortal failings, shortcomings, and sins. I wonder if any of us relate to their experience? Have you ever become suddenly aware of your failings or wrong doing in a way that felt almost too painful to look at? I know I have.

But many of the saints describe having an experience like this - it may be unexpected, but they repeatedly describe a sense that the closer they got to God, the more keenly aware they become of their sin and failings. The closer they were to touching holiness, the more they recognized their own imperfections in contrast. It's like the way a sheep's white woolly coat may look very nice and very white against a green pasture as a background. But if you take those same sheep and place them on a hillside of freshly fallen snow, their white coats look discolored, dingy or dirty in comparison to the bright snow around them. Or, if you, like me, were ever taken in by those teeth whitening ads that invite you to measure your

teeth's whiteness against their standard, then you may know what I'm talking about.

This reading comes up every three years on Trinity Sunday, which we celebrate today, and as Isaiah has this close encounter with the holy, Almighty God of the Universe, he becomes deeply aware of just how much he and his people fall short of true holiness. He immediately feels unworthy and unfit and even wants to flee from God's presence. Far from being dramatic, it's probably a very normal human reaction if we ever found ourselves in the presence of Divine holiness, in God's presence- and suddenly see all the ways in which we fall short. Perhaps we may even despair. It is a true revelation in that sense...revealing who and what we are. I imagine it's a bit like having a giant magnifying glass on all our motives and morals and life choices revealing to us our every flaw. It does not sound fun.

Have you ever used one of those super magnifying mirrors that magnifies your skin and reveals far more than you care to see? I remember looking at one of those mirrors for the first time and feeling horrified by all the imperfections I could now see so clearly, many of which I had never known about before! Nor did I want to know about! It isn't that the mirror was being cruel, it was just showing me a reality I didn't see before. But it was not reality that I or the rest of the world see regularly: in fact.... I like to think that only God and I know about that. But the bright magnifying mirror of God's holy Trinitarian presence, when shining on one's soul, could be hard to take. We like to believe that we're basically doing good...that we're good people doing good things and we're generally proud of it. And that's fine...but...

What about when the deeper sins and failings are revealed? Sin of course just means "to miss the mark." And we all do that. But what is our reaction? Do we reject this revelation? Embrace it? For many of us, this past year has felt like a revelation- like a magnifying glass on our culture and on our own hearts as people - a revealing of sin and failings that perhaps we didn't fully realize.

I know that's happened for me. In the days, weeks and months just before and after George Floyd was killed, whose death we commemorated just this past week, along with the escalation in violence we have been seeing (including the shooting we just had in San Jose) what has come up for me has been not only deep pain but a desperate search for answers to the question of "How?" How does this happen? How does it keep happening? And "Why" – Why is it happening? Many of us have started to read more and wanted to learn more about the root causes behind our violence and I know that as I have done this, it has felt like a giant magnifying glass shining light on things I didn't want to see. I have felt personally convicted about my own sin and ignorance. And at times I have felt despairing.

Whenever we're confronted with a hard reality – a glimpse into the deeper flaws - the sin in life... we can really choose 1 of 3 paths from there. The first path is to simply reject it. The second path is something of a trap: it's the path that leads to us getting stuck there. Many people throughout history have gotten stuck this way once they saw behind the curtain so to speak -they focused so much on the problem that they couldn't move beyond it. It can lead to despair or anger at themselves and others, and cause them to be unable to find compassion and grace for themselves and others.

But there is a third path, and that path involves allowing that new knowledge to become the impetus that launches one into healing and reconciliation with God, one's self, and others. That knowledge and revelation, with God's help, can lead into healing action and sense of purpose. Isaiah chooses the third path...there is the acknowledgement of sin but immediately there is the embracing of God's mercy – of looking to God for healing and strength. In Isaiah's case, God sends a seraph to touch Isaiah's lips with a live coal and declares: "Your sin is blotted out." So don't stay stuck on the sin – move on knowing God forgives and has a purpose for you. Because immediately God gives Isaiah a new opportunity. Just when Isaiah is most aware of his weakness and fallenness

God asks him, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah says, "Here am I; send me!" The third path leads to holy action by God's amazing grace. And we too are called into healing and forgiveness so that we can fulfill our calling and purpose.

On this Trinity Sunday, God's Word reminds us of God's desire to bring us into the blessed, loving, and merciful life of the Holy Trinity. We are not perfect- and we may be aware of our sin and our flaws and our failures as though they have been magnified - we are people of unclean lips - but our sins are blotted out by God's grace. When God asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" then, for whatever God has put upon your heart - will you respond as Isaiah did? "Here am I; send me!"