

# WORSHIP

Sermon | 2.10.2019



## Unprepared

**The Reverend Pen Peery**

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ 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!’

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May the words of my mouth and meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

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Sometimes, when I step into this pulpit and look out at you on Sunday morning, a question I carry with me is: why you are here?

I mean – I’m glad you are!



But sometimes I just wonder what gets you up in the morning to get dressed, make the drive (or the walk), and step into this sanctuary. I wonder what you step out of to be here – and what awaits you when you head back home into the routine of your week:

the joys and demands of family life,

projects and challenges at work,

school – with homework and tests...not mention figuring out the social scene,

the pressure – to perform, to please, to provide.

It's been about 20 years since I last had to regularly make the choice to come to worship on Sunday morning. When leading worship is your day job, it can be easy forget that almost everyone who joins you in the sanctuary is there because they choose to be.

I bet if asked why you are here I would get a variety of answers.

Maybe it is to feel a part of community.

Maybe it is to learn something.

Maybe it's a habit.

Maybe you were told you had to be here.

Maybe you have questions, or you are curious.

Maybe there is something in you that feels hurt, or empty, and a sanctuary just seemed like the best place to go.

I think all of those are valid reasons – and, perhaps, over the course of your life, you've experienced all of those motivations to be here.

But at a fundamental level, I think the reason we come to worship is because here we get to experience something holy. In worship we come into contact with the mystery and majesty of God – and that does something to us.

The fact is – you can be in community anywhere. You can go anywhere to learn – or nowhere at all if you have good book. There are other habits you can create. Other ways you seek after the answers to your questions. There are alternatives to finding comfort for the places where you are hurting.



What is unique about this room – and this experience we share when we worship in this room – is that, in here, we practice a weekly drama that helps us reorient our lives – not around our goals, or our wants, or our anxieties...but around the God who flung the stars the moon – who gave us life – and who is too wonderful for us to fully understand.

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In the year that King Uzziah died, a man named Isaiah walked into the Temple and came into contact with the holiness of God. For Isaiah, there was a progression to his experience in that temple: First, he had a vision of splendor...of how vast and majestic God was. Next, he became keenly aware of his inadequacy. “I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips.” Isaiah gives voice what it is to stand face to face with a vision of perfection and to notice the ways we fall short. Then, Isaiah experiences grace – his sin is purified...cleansed. Finally, full from this experience of grace – Isaiah is commissioned...he is sent to be about God’s work in the world. Not for Isaiah’s sake or for his gain...but in order that Isaiah might point back to the one who is holy.

If that pattern sounds familiar, good!

Consider what happens when we gather in this room:

Will and the choir use the gift of music – not so that we would appreciate it as art (which it is), but so that the music might take us some place...a place transcendent, where we catch a vision of God’s splendor.

Each week, we take time to pray together – to confess the ways we fall short of God’s vision for our lives. We don’t do that to be Debbie Downers...we do it because, when we are aware that we are in the presence of God’s holiness, it becomes obvious that we are men and women of unclean lips who live in the midst of a people with unclean lips.

Each week, we hear a word of grace – of Good News – that purifies us, and reminds of our forgiveness in Christ, of just how loved we are by God, and just how much God’s promises can be trusted.

And then, when we are grounded in our identity as God’s people, as members of Christ’s body – we are sent...back out into the world...beyond this sanctuary to



live – not for ourselves, but to bring glory and honor to the God who is at the center of this world and our lives – with new eyes to see.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann notes that this event in the temple that is described in the sixth chapter of Isaiah contains all that is right with worship.

We don't worship because it makes us feel good.

We don't worship because it makes us better than anyone else.

We come to this room to worship in order to reorient our lives around the one who is holy – rather than around anyone or anything else.

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Today's passage is often referred to as the "call of Isaiah." As in, the story of when God tapped Isaiah on the shoulder and asked him to be about God's work. But if you listened carefully, Isaiah was the one who actually raised his hand. He wasn't voluntold. He volunteered. "Here I am – send me!"

He was swept up in God's presence.

Willing to do and be about the hard work of God's kingdom.

Unafraid to fail.

But because he was human, after he left the Temple, I wonder just how long it took that voice in Isaiah (which lurks in all of us) to interrupt his spiritual high and ask – "send...you?"

How long do you think it took for the impostor syndrome to settle into Isaiah's subconscious...undermining his confidence: "why you? What have you done? What about those unclean lips? You are going to be God's prophet? How long until you screw that up? How long until the people around will know...that you're a fraud. How have you prepared for this? What qualifies you to be about this kind of work? You're not special. You're not called."

In the world beyond this sanctuary it is easy to equate being prepared with being successful. All of us who work know this to be true. Executing a good business plan, teaching an effective class, closing a solid deal, making the right diagnosis...



to do that well requires that we put in the effort – that we adequately prepare – because if we don't, the results will show.

There's nothing wrong with being prepared – it's just that, in my experience, when it comes to matters of faith – and when it comes to saying yes to something that God has asked us to do – our perceived need to be prepared...to feel up to the task...to, first, be worthy of God's work...can become a weight that holds us down.

What is funny is, when you look through these pages and read about who God calls to do God's work, preparation is almost never a requirement. At least it doesn't seem to be a characteristic that God is looking for...

Moses stuttered and had a past he wasn't proud of.

Isaiah was a man of unclean lips.

Jeremiah was too young.

Esther was an orphan who lived too far from home.

Mary wasn't married.

Peter and James and John hadn't caught any fish...and they were worn out from life.

Saul was a persecutor of Christians, for goodness sake!

What's your excuse? I know you've got one.

You don't feel like you know enough?

Have you ever had doubts about the things you think you are supposed to believe, and maybe think having those doubts disqualifies you from God's work?

Do you feel like a hypocrite – sometimes living a life that evidences faith and other times living a life that reflects other values?

Are you ashamed – carrying the weight of something you've done or something you should have done – that renders you damaged goods?

If so – you are the stuff of a disciple.

You are exactly the kind of person that God has used and will use to be about God's work.

Congratulations.



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The opportunity to be about God's work will come – you rarely plan for it. Sometimes it comes in ways that are welcome, other times not as much.

Sometimes that call – that sense of where we are supposed to join in God's work – builds in us gradually, like a rising tide.

Other times, God's call is thrust upon us, in ways that divide our life from one chapter to the next.

In the year that King Uzziah died...

In the year you got the diagnosis...

In the year retirement came early...

In the year you moved into your house...

In the year you got sober...

In the year you became a parent...

In the year you lost your parent...

A friend of mine says, these kind of events remind us not just of when it is, but who we will become and who God is.

In the year that Nancy died, I was 22 years old and in seminary. My faith and my relationship with God was academic...observational. I enjoyed the study. I believed – but I hadn't really been tested...I hadn't been in a situation where I had to risk something to demonstrate what I believed.

Nancy was the mother of two teenagers in the youth group where I was the youth director. My phone rang on a Saturday. There had been an accident. The girls were on their way to a children's hospital. Nancy was being airlifted to a trauma unit. I went to be with the girls, who were afraid, but not hurt. Nancy's husband, Steve, had gone to be with her. A couple of hours later, Steve came to see the girls and share the words that broke their lives into before and after.

The youth group was supposed to go to a conference in the mountains at Montreat the next week. We showed up a few days late – after the funeral. Nancy's girls came. We were all together – clinging to one another – groping for answers – desperate for resurrection hope. It was in that moment that faith



became real for me. God's promises moved beyond the theoretical. I didn't feel adequate, but my calling to proclaim good news to the broken-hearted took shape and took hold.

One of the great privileges of what I get to do is be with you and share with you in those moments that call something from you – moments of challenge, of grief, of opportunity, of change.

Rarely, do we feel prepared.

Always, there an invitation to faithfulness – to embrace who God would have us be and become through those moments.

In the meantime, I am glad you have done whatever it is you had to do to make the choice to be here...in this sanctuary.

Because it is here that we remember what it is to be in the presence of the one who is holy.

It is here that week after week, we re-orient ourselves and our lives, to reflect an awareness of what is holy.

It is from here that we are sent – understanding ourselves to be known, loved, and called...until we come back again to be reminded.

In the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

