

## You Are Holy, Holy, Holy!

A sermon based on Isaiah 6:1-8.

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

“I’m not going to ask you again...” Do you like having to repeat yourself? How many times will you tell the kids to clean their room before you discipline them and take away their TV privileges? How many times do you have to ask your spouse to take out the trash before you do it yourself? I bet if I were to take a poll, that number would be...3. Right, three strikes, and you’re out.

Why three, though? That’s the number we tend to gravitate towards. What’s the purpose in repeating yourself three times?

Over the years, there’s actually been quite a bit of discussion around the use of the number 3. Perhaps you’ve heard of the “rule of three,” where, like in writing, events or characters introduced in threes are more humorous, satisfying, effect in the execution of the story and in engaging the reader...also making the audience more likely to remember information conveyed.

That makes sense. Tell me something three times, and I’m bound to remember it better than if you say it once. But we see the ‘rule of three’ all round us: the *Three Little Pigs*, *Three Musketeers*, the *Three Stooges*...in slogans like, “Stop! Drop! And roll!” or “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” I’m sure we could go on.

Again, why three? Sometimes, things are grouped in three to emphasize an idea. And today, Trinity Sunday, it’s fitting for us to talk about three as we remember...as we celebrate our one God, three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And celebrate not just who they are but who we are because of them. And this will be easy for you to remember. More importantly, this is essential for your life yesterday, today, and forever. Because of the holy Trinity, you are holy, holy, holy!

Now, in our verses today from Isaiah, do you see the Trinity? You’re not going to see that word *Trinity*. It’s a word you won’t find in Scripture; rather it’s the word we use to describe the indescribable – three in one. We have one God, but there are three separate, distinct persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. Yet there aren’t three Gods. One God, three persons.

But where are they here? How does this point to the Trinity? Well, in three ways.

First, look at what the seraphs (these special kind of angels) call out to one another as they surround the throne of God: **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord...”** Now, the Hebrew language has this unique literary feature, where repetition expresses a superlative. So, it was their way of saying, “The LORD Almighty is the holiest.” No argument there. In a little while, you’re going to have the opportunity to join them as you sing, “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! God in three persons, blessed Trinity!” We associate that song of the seraphs with our Triune God because we know this to be true...Holy (and perfect) is God the Father. Holy (and perfect) is God the Son. Holy (and perfect) is God the Holy Spirit.

Another part of our section where we can MORE clearly see the Trinity is in the words God speaks, **“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”** Do you notice anything unusual about the wording

here? It seems grammatically incorrect. God says, "Whom shall I (singular) send?" But then it's, "Who will go for us (plural)?" There's no change in subject. God's talking to himself. But, just like at creation, when God (also) said to himself, "**Let us make man in our image,**" he's talking to the other persons of the Trinity, who are, at the same time, God. Odd, but true!

And then, the one last way we can see the Trinity here? We see every person of the Trinity active in Isaiah's calling. Yeah, we don't have the ease of Scripture just plainly telling us, "Here's the Father, here's the Son, here's the Holy Spirit in this section." But look hard enough, and you see them. Can you? The Father, he's the one sitting on the throne. He's the one asking for Isaiah to go and be his messenger.

The Son? Well, what made Isaiah worthy for that calling? Listen to what the seraph said as he touched the live coal to Isaiah's lips, "**See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.**" And who do we associate with the work of removing guilt and atoning for sin? That's right, Jesus through his death on the cross.

And then, finally, we see the Holy Spirit from Isaiah's final words, "**Here am I. Send me!**" Only the Holy Spirit could have produced such a sudden change of heart in Isaiah, to go from "**Woe to me! I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips**" to his instant and eager response of "YES, here am I!" to serving God.

For Isaiah, what a blessing to have the Triune God there...and working in him and through him...because Isaiah was well-aware of what it would mean if God wasn't present...at all...in his life. And we're well-aware of what it would mean for our lives if our holy, Triune God was not present and active in our lives, either.

Along with Isaiah, we would have to confess "**I am a man of unclean lips.**" And that would only be the tip of our problems. Because, just as present and just as active as the holy Trinity ought to be in our lives is unholy trinity. Do you know it? It consists of the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature.

And as difficult as it may have been for you to locate the Trinity in this section, it's as easy to locate the unholy trinity in your life today. Just open your eyes. They're in plain sight. The devil, he might not be fighting you as openly as he did sometimes with Jesus, like when he directly tempted Jesus, but he's working every avenue to get us to sin. He's coordinating every attack against us and our faith in Jesus. He's relentless. And he's often successful.

And you know the temptations of the world. "Don't judge me" is their battle cry. "Toleration" is their banner. "Jesus says to love, so that means you can't speak out against my sin; that's not loving. That's hate. Tolerate!" And what's unfortunate is many times, we do. It's amazing, scary, sad how quickly society is bullying us into silence and dulling our consciences, making what is ungodly and unclean and despicable and sinful ok, even for us.

And then there's your sinful nature. Above all else, your sinful nature is always there, making you question everything God wants you to be doing, like Paul wrote about, "**The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.**" And that sinful nature has got nothing but support from the devil and the world, making it so much harder for you to avoid going down that road of sin.

Isaiah and you and me and every person, we are more than just a people of unclean lips. We're unclean all the way to the core. Isaiah knew, as every sinner knows when confronted by a holy, the most holy God, who demands perfection that he was by nature sinful. Isaiah reached the conclusion that every human, including you and I, must reach: **"Woe to me! ... I am ruined!"** Our Triune God is holy, and his demand for holiness and perfection leads us to realize how unholy and sinful we are. His holiness separates God from every sinner, including you and me. His almighty power threatens every sinner with eternal separation and punishment. And we, like Isaiah, had nothing to offer God that would appease him. There is nothing left for us except fear, like Isaiah had, afraid because his eyes had seen the Lord, and he knew no one could see God and live. Nor did he deserve to.

Neither do we. No matter what lies the devil feeds you, no matter how much the world celebrates your rebellion and sin against God, no matter how much your sinful nature tries to soothe your conscience and tell you you're ok, in God's holy presence, you are a sinner. You are unclean. You are unholy. You are unholy. You are unholy. And so am I.

And the only words that can...that should escape our lips would mirror what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7, **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"** Or simply, as Isaiah lamented, "Oi," the Hebrew word, an onomatopoeia for, "Woe!" Painfully aware of our unholiness, we are left only with an impassioned expressed of grief and despair. We are ruined.

But we're not. **"See this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."** When Isaiah acknowledged his guilt to God, God, our Triune God, our holy God, in his grace, did something about it.

Here, one of the seraphs brought a live coal in his hand—a coal which was taken from the altar, the place of sacrifice. And whether it was miraculously cool to the touch as this was just a vision or whether it literally burned Isaiah's lips and tongue, leaving a physical scar and a very vivid reminder of this event every day of his life to follow, of one thing we can be certain: it's effect....the same effect that's ours.

The coal from the altar—the place of sacrifice where God so graphically and vividly illustrated that sin must be punished with death but that God would allow a substitute to die in the place of man—that coal had taken Isaiah's sin away as if it had been completely burned up!

Literally, where the NIV says, **"Your guilt is taken away,"** it's "Your guilt has been removed." In other words, it's past tense. It's complete. It's done. There was nothing left for Isaiah to do. His guilt had been removed. His sin had been atoned for. He would not be ruined. He would not die, but would live.

Of course, for you and I, the altar is still a reminder of sacrifice. And above our altar, we have a symbol of the ultimate sacrifice to which all the Old Testament sacrifices pointed. We know of the once for all sacrifice Jesus made on the altar of the cross. And through that altar, God has removed our guilt and atoned for our sin. And it's still past tense. It's complete. The Father sent the Son. The Son died to pay for our sins. It's done. There is nothing left for us to do.

And now, it's not a live coal, but Jesus' very body and blood that touches our mouths every other week (and today) and assures us again and again: **"See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."**

Friends, celebrate the way the Trinity intimately has worked together for your good...for your salvation. The Father, who created you and preserves you, sent his Son. And Jesus, he lived, he died, he rose for you. And now, you are forgiven. Your sin is gone for good. You are at peace with God. You are holy! You are holy! You are holy!

And that verdict lasts forever. Notice how our verses begin, ***"In the year King Uzziah died."*** Human kings died; our Triune God lives and reigns forever. Jesus' sacrifice is forever. Your forgiveness is forever. Your holiness is God's sight is forever.

And, like Isaiah, we go from terror at God's wrath to peace at God's forgiveness...and now, to eager servants willing to do whatever God asked. But what caused such a change...this sudden transformation in Isaiah? Forgiveness and the realization God wanted to use him produces Isaiah's "Send me!" Forgiveness worked a miracle inside the prophet. Courage replaced fear. Willingness replaced a sense of unworthiness.

The Holy Spirit changed him, much like he's changed us. Yes, through the pages of Scripture, the Holy Spirit moves us to praise God for his mighty act of salvation, and to even do it loudly and joyfully, like the seraphs, whose praises to the Triune God shook the very foundations of the temple.

But there's still another message to share that can reverberate throughout the world and shake hearts out of spiritual slumber...and that's the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

God wants to send sinful, weak, human people like me, like you to speak for him! He could have chosen seraphs, but he chose us! How incredible! And the Holy Spirit works a miracle in us through faith in that forgiveness we have received. He replaces our fears with courage and a zeal to become an eager volunteer. And we respond to his grace and say, ***"Here am I. Send me!"***

Who's worthy of such a task? Who's worthy of such grace? On our own, we're not. But today, we celebrate the Triune God who has worked in our lives to make us not only worthy...not only clean...but sinless, perfect, holy, holy, holy. And we won't forget that grace. We will tell...tell others the good news our hearts rejoice to hear, "You are holy! You are holy! Because of our Triune God, you are holy!" Amen.