

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ May 22, 2016



In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am

ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” ⁸ 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!” (Isaiah 6:1-8)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

There was some exciting news around Grace this week. As many of you know, last Thursday was Call Day – a special day for our church body when the seniors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were assigned to their first place of ministry. It gives a wonderful reminder that these men don’t just decide to be pastors, but God calls them to be pastors. Grace was requesting two graduates to serve as Pastors – one at our Tucson site, and a second at our Sahuarita site. We rejoice with God that he saw fit to bless us with a Pastor for our Tucson site, Pastor Tim Patoka. Some of you may have even watched the call service live.

This morning, in our First Lesson we heard about another call day, it was the call day of the Prophet Isaiah. And what a glorious call day that was. God called the prophet Isaiah to be his messenger to the people of Israel and Judah, and he served in that role for 45 long years. Another similarity between the Seminary’s call day and Isaiah’s call day is the glorious setting. While nothing can quite compare to being in the throne room of God, a call day service at our Seminary is about as close as you can get here on this earth. What I mean by that is this – nothing quite compares to the sound of 1,500 voices singing praise to God for what he has done. Not unlike the angels singing **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty”** and having the foundations of the heavenly temple shake.

It is the refrain of the angels singing in heaven that we will want to take a closer look at this morning. Because while call day is a special day – whether for the 36 men from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, or for Isaiah 2,700 years ago, the focus is never on the men being sent out, but rather it is on the one sending them out, our three-in-one God. We see evidence of this three-in-one God in each of our lessons this morning, and there is no coincidence in that. Not only will we examine the confession of our triune God in the Apostle’s

Creed, but it is also the day on which the church has traditionally called Trinity Sunday. We use the words of the angel's song to guide our meditation, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD ALMIGHTY

1. A Holy Creator
2. A Holy Redeemer
3. A Holy Sanctifier

(1)

The words we consider this morning come from the pen of the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus was to be born, and he lived during a time that was economically speaking very prosperous, but spiritually speaking very bankrupt. This was on display when God inflicted the King of Judah, Uzziah with leprosy for trying to do the job of a priest. But it was only after Uzziah died that Isaiah was called into the Holy Ministry of God. Isaiah did not take this honor upon himself, but rather God chose him for it. And he chose him in a very special way.

Isaiah was granted an appearance into the throne room of God, how this exactly transpired we don't know, only that it did. It was there that he saw God on his throne with angels above shouting the refrain, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD ALMIGHTY. So loud was this song that the very foundations of the heavenly temple shook, and God's presence filled it with smoke. It is the fact that those angels didn't just stop by saying God was holy, but three-times holy that catches our attention. And maybe first of all we need to understand what it means that God is not only holy, but three times holy.

The word "holy" conveys a sense of separateness, and so in this case we're talking about how God is separate, he is so far set apart from his creation, he is without equal. But it's not talking about how God is so many miles away from us, or even that he is so much greater than we are, but it's that he is perfect and we are not. That fact became very clear for Isaiah as he stood there trembling in the throne room of God. He stood there trembling before a holy creator. And that is who our God is.

We confess in the Apostles' Creed, "*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.*" It was God who spoke and the universe came into being. It was God who breathed life into the first man Adam. And when God had finished creating he said it was good, he said it was perfect, he said it was holy. A holy creator created a holy creation. But the reason it did not stay that way was not because of God, but because of man. It was Adam and Eve who trespassed over God's holy command and brought the whole human race into sin and death. God would have had every right to incinerate his creation and start new. But he didn't. Instead, he promised to send a Savior. It is because of this Savior that God, the holy creator, is not aloof from his creation, but he preserves it still today. Without the holy creator, the world would stop spinning on its axis, the stars would stop shining, we would stop breathing.

This is the God whom Isaiah saw, "**seated on a throne, high and exalted, the train of his robe filling the temple.**" A God whose holiness is so great that even the holy angels covered their feet and their faces. And now just imagine how Isaiah felt. He put it simply, "**Woe to me! "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the Lord almighty."**

Now, to put this in terms that might be a little bit more understandable for us. When we're just hanging out with friends or our family, we don't think as much about what we do, what we say and how we

dress, we're just "hanging out." When you go to school, to church, to work, we might be a little bit more conscious of what we do, say and dress. Then just imagine if you were invited to a fancy dinner at the White House to meet the President, you would definitely be more aware of what you did, said and dressed.

That just has to do with what's on the outside. God sees what's on the inside. And so maybe when we're just hanging out with friends, we don't think we're all that bad. You come to church, the pastor preaches about sin and you may start to realize that maybe those thoughts weren't the most wholesome. But if you were to come into the presence of God, our tiniest sin of thought or deed would stand out like a sore thumb. The worst part about it is there's nothing we can do. Isaiah realized this when he merely said, **"Woe to me! I am ruined!"**

(2)

And then before Isaiah could ask for forgiveness, before he could even ask what he must do, **"One of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'"** Isaiah didn't do anything, but rather something was done to him to make him clean.

Just like Isaiah, we are people of unclean lips, and we live among people of unclean lips. And it's not just our lips that have betrayed us before God, but our minds, and our hearts as well. But this is where the second holiness of our God comes in. Remember, he's not just one time holy, but he's three-times holy. The second holiness is what Isaiah calls, **"The Holy One of Israel."**

The holy one of Israel was the fulfillment of the promise God made to Adam and Eve to send a Savior. And while that Savior was not born for several thousand years after the promise was made, that Savior still existed. He existed with God the Father in the beginning as the second person of the Triune God. And at just the right time, the holy one of Israel was born in this world, taking on human flesh and weakness. It was Christ who sacrificed his own perfect body on the altar of the cross to pay for the sins of the world. This is the altar from which Isaiah received forgiveness, and it is also the altar from which we receive forgiveness also.

This forgiveness is not obtained by how worthy we are, our background, our age or our efforts. In fact, the only way forgiveness is obtained is by not trying to obtain it. Just like Isaiah didn't go to the altar, so also we cannot go to God's altar. God's forgiveness was brought to Isaiah by the angel, so also God's forgiveness is brought to us. It is brought to us by the third holy person of our God, God the Holy Spirit.

(3)

The Holy Spirit is more than just the will or the inclination of God. It is the third person of the Trinity, as much of a person as the Father and the Son. And it is the Holy Spirit who brings us forgiveness. If you would open your catechism's to page 8 (or on the screen), you will see the explanation of the Holy Spirit's Work. *"I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel."*

It is the Holy Spirit that calls us to faith and brings to us the forgiveness that Jesus won. And what a blessing that is. Because it's all about our holy God, there is no doubt about it. There is no doubt about if we

really believed. There is no doubt about if God could forgive my sins. There is no doubt about getting to heaven, because it isn't about us, it's about him.

The Holy Spirit not only brought us to faith, but he also strengthens us in our faith. This is a process called Sanctification. The Holy Spirit is the holy sanctifier. He was the one who called Isaiah to be his messenger 2700 years ago. He is the one who calls pastors and teachers to be pastors and teachers. He is also the one who is working in you. You might say God is thrilled that you believe in Jesus, and yes that simple trust in what he has done is enough to get you to heaven. But God would be disappointed, and any Christian foolish to just stay an infant in the faith. Rather, God wants us to grow, and the Holy Spirit helps us grow.

He helps us to grow when we invest time in his Word. For when we spend time in his Word and chew on what it means, whether that it is here in church or at home, we grow stronger. On the flip side, when we don't spend time in God's Word, we grow weaker. Many people wouldn't want to skip a day's worth of meals. A Christian will not want to miss a day's worth of studying in God's Word. I don't there's anyone here that would disagree with that. Putting it into practice however, is the difficult part. Because we all have our busy, hectic lives and we wonder how we can squeeze in time for ourselves, let alone for God's Word.

There's any number of suggestions that people have made. One of the suggestions I hope you take to heart is the suggestion to take home this catechism and read through it. Read through the section on the Apostles' Creed – right away when you get up or right before bed, read it alone or read it with your family. Make it a habit to spend some time with God's Word, I know it will be worth it. Because HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD ALMIGHTY. He is the one who created us, he is the one who has redeemed us, he is the one who continues to sanctify us. Amen.