

Dear workers for Christ,

The job reports keep coming out and the news doesn't seem to be real good, does it? This economy has put a lot of people out of work. It's right around 10% last time I checked. That means statistically and realistically, even this group should be affected significantly. That's tough. So, in this economy – just about any job looks good, doesn't it? ...especially if you're part of that 10%.

How would you respond, then, if I told you that I had a job for you...but it wouldn't make you money; it wouldn't bring you honor; it wouldn't bring you respect. In fact, it would bring just the opposite. You'll look like a failure; you'll be hated; you'll be ridiculed; you'll be persecuted. If I offered you a job like that, would you take it? To ever take a job like that, you'd better have a pretty good reason, right?

When God called Isaiah to serve him as his prophet, God told Isaiah up front that no one would listen to him. He would look like nothing but a failure. In fact, the only repayment for 60 years of service that Isaiah received from the people of Judah was most likely the sharp side of the saw used to cut him in half. Why in the world would anyone agree to a job that was guaranteed to have results like that? Someone would have to have a pretty good reason.

Guess what – you do. Today we'll be looking at this call of Isaiah in our Old Testament Lesson and ask the question we see there – **“Who will go for God?”** Who would ever take this job? Well, only one type of person could – **one who has seen God's glory and one who has seen God's Love.**

You see our text records just that happening. The first five chapters of Isaiah's prophecy had been judgment on Judah and the wrath of God on their sin described. Then, Isaiah tells us how he got involved in all this. God showed him his glory.

He says it happened in the year King Uzziah died. Uzziah had been the greatest king of Judah since Solomon when it came to power and control. Things looked like they were going great – the territory expanding, the power increasing. The people were liking what Uzziah was accomplishing. He looked like a king they could trust in. But then he died. That must have shaken the people. So in that first sentence of our text, Isaiah transitions from the throne of Uzziah to the throne room of the real power. **“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.”**

Think about what is happening here. Isaiah saw God, and all he can say about what he looked like was that his robe was big?!?! Remember in Exodus, at Mount Sinai, when the elders saw the God of Israel? The only description given there was this **“Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire.”** Even John, in Revelation – all he could say

about the One on the throne was that there was **“the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.”**

Notice, even the angels here had to shield their eyes from his glory. All Isaiah can do is describe the things his senses can fathom: He saw the angels, he could describe that. He smelt the smoke of God’s presence and that incense. He felt the whole structure shaking; He heard the booming sound of those voices shouting **“holy holy holy”** – reminding all who hear of what God is and why we can’t be in his presence. This is all so overwhelming. All he can say is what it made him feel – DEATH – **“Woe to me! I am ruined,”** literally “cut off” - dead.

That’s what Peter confessed in our Gospel lesson too, isn’t it? **“Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man.”** Isn’t that what we have to say too? Think about that. We talk about wanting to be with God, right? Are we remembering who we’re talking about? Who would really want to be in the presence of a holy God?

When my kids are in trouble – one of the hardest things to make them do is look me in the eyes - they know they’ve disobeyed, they know they have messed up – so they can’t even make eye contact. And I’m a sinful human who has messed up far more than they have. Now think about us being with God. You’ve disobeyed. You’ve cheated him. You’ve told him he’s not all that important to you whenever you’ve found some excuse from HIS creation that makes you *too busy* to give Him the first fruits of your time, your work, your gifts. If you’ve just cheated or stolen from another person and you know it and they know it – do you really want to hang out with them – especially when they have the power and authority and the nature to crush you?

That’s what we’re talking about. God asks us to go for him, to live for him, to give for him – and, let’s face it – we don’t...not as if he is truly THE most important facet of all of our life. And now we want to be in his presence?!? Isaiah had it right. **“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 King, the LORD Almighty.”**

But, wait a second. What we see here of the glory of this Holy God isn’t the only place the Bible tells us about him. Listen to St. Luke record the angel’s explanation to Mary of this all-glorious One: **“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the HOLY ONE to be born will be called the Son of God.’”** You see, the holiness of God is like a two sided coin. Isaiah looked into the throne room and said, “Woe to me” because he only saw one side, but Christ came to flip that coin over. And on the other side, we see his glorious love.

If you’ve been with me when we go out and knock on doors, chances are you’ve heard me ask my favorite question in one way, shape, or form. Do you know what question I’m talking about? “If you died tonight and God asked you why he should let you into his heaven, what would you say?” I ask that question – because it really makes us put ourselves in this scene, in the

presence of God, and ask ourselves if we belong there. It makes us realize a fundamental problem every human has. The problem: God is holy. We are not.

But most people, when you ask that question will “hope” or “suppose” or “figure” that God will let them in because they’ve been “pretty good”, because they’ve “never done anything really bad”, because they “live by the Bible and try to do what’s right.” But “pretty good” isn’t holy, is it? *Trying* isn’t good enough – just ask the Vikings or the Jets. But this is bigger than sport or even the Super Bowl. There’s not a “next year” when it comes to Judgment. There’s NOTHING we can do on this. There’s no such thing as “kind of holy”. Woe to me. I am ruined.

But Glory to God. He loved us. And that love made him do something about this fundamental problem. Look at verse 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.** God didn’t banish Isaiah from the throne room or strike him dead. No, he so loved the world, so he took action as our Savior. Here the angel brings a coal 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 is atoned for.’”**

At first, this picture doesn’t seem to make sense, does it? Touching your lips with a burning coal seems like it would be the last thing you’d want, seems bad. The pain should be incredible. But for Isaiah, something that looked terrible was wonderful. Something that looked like it would bring pain brought healing.

That coal from the altar of sacrifice is a perfect picture of Jesus Christ and what he did for us. He went to the cross and was nailed, hand and foot, and he died a gruesome death. It looks like nothing but death and pain and hurt. But Jesus rose from the dead, triumphant over the grave, our conquering Savior, and suddenly that cross became a cleansing coal, and his pain brings our healing.

God loved you enough to come and touch your unclean lips with the coal of Christ’s death from the altar of His sacrifice. He came to each of you to make you holy, cleansing your lips, taking away all guilt, washing away all sin. No longer do we need to tremble at the thought of God’s holiness, because we’ve seen the other side of the coin...because we have Christ’s holiness now. We are just as *set apart* as He is. God sees no stain of sin when he looks at us because we have been washed in the blood of the lamb. That is love.

Like at what Jesus said to Peter when Peter thought he belonged away from Jesus’ holiness in our gospel lesson. He says the same to you. **“Do not fear. From now on, you will catch men.”** As soon as Isaiah heard that his sin was atoned for, listen to the very next thing he heard. **Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”** Through the power of God’s Word, you’ve seen and heard the same things as Isaiah. What’s your answer?

A couple weeks ago, I was on kid duty and had a few things that had been on the “honey do” list for a while, so I asked my three year old son if he wanted to help me put together the deckbox/bench thing we had bought a kit for a while back. Now, I know, most parents think their kids are advanced, but I was under no illusion that this three-year old could read the directions to tell me what came next. He doesn’t know how to install hinges. He had no clue what he would be able to do – but when I asked him, he literally dropped what he was doing, jumped up and yelled, “Yeah” and ran after me. Then, when mom got home, you want to guess the first thing he told her? “Mom, I built the bench!” - proud as can be.

When it comes to the task we’ve been asked to do – “Who will go for God?” – None of us are up to the task, are we? None of us deserve the job. But yet God asks, “Who will go for us?” You know Isaiah’s answer. We just sang it a few times. It’s right there at the end of the text. **And I said, “Here am I. Send me.”**

Think about that change in Isaiah. He had just barely finished condemning himself to death in fear, and now he is volunteering himself for service in God’s work. Why such a change? Isaiah had seen God’s glory and had seen his love. Now he wanted a part of the work. Even though he was completely inadequate for the job, God asked Isaiah to take part in the work. He asked him to help build that bench.

He’s asking you today too. And you see the same thing happening here in God’s house as Isaiah did. We came into his presence today and confessed that we don’t deserve to be here with him in our Confession. We sang, “Lord have mercy.” And he showed us the other side of the coin. He declared his love and forgiveness. Here He is with all his glory and power in His Word – so, in a few minutes, as we approach his table, we will join the song of the angels singing “Holy. Holy. Holy.” We will look to the Lamb of God to have mercy on us – and then he will touch our lips with the proof of the sacrifice, the body and blood given for our salvation.

Then, as we go out from here today – he asks. Only after he has shown us the splendor of his glory and the miracle of his love, he asks: Who will go for me? The job will not make you rich, but you will bring God’s treasure to the poor in spirit. The job doesn’t promise power, but you will be the tool God uses to bring His power to bear. You may not even always be welcomed here – but one day you will receive a hero’s welcome in the kingdom that knows no end.

Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? Let’s answer him together. **“Here am I. Send me.”** On the table right outside the door, there are a dozen different ways for you to do what he’s calling you to do. Sign up and let him send you into this harvest field.

God lets us help.

In Christ,

Amen.