

Good Morning! Can you imagine seeing God? Well hopefully one day, but not today!

So, what was happening at this point in time, since the opening phrase states "in the year that King Uzziah died"? Why would that be the opening phrase and who was King Uzziah? King Uzziah was just 16 when he was elected king of Judah and he reigned for 52 years. In the beginning Uzziah sought God and he listened to the prophet, Zechariah and King Uzziah flourished and prospered by following God's rules. King Uzziah expanded the lands of Judah and fought battles against the Philistines, the Meunites, and the Arabians. He also loved the land and had huge vineyards, farms and he dug many cisterns to water the huge amounts of livestock he had. He built walls and towers to protect his people and had men create innovative mechanisms to throw boulders and weapons from the towers. Because he was so blessed by the Lord, he became very powerful and famous.

Like many people who are greatly blessed, they forget to thank the Lord. They forget they did not do all these things themselves. Uzziah became so full of himself, he felt he did not have to listen to God. One day he went into the temple to light incense. When Azariah, the high priest saw this, he and a group of 80 priests tried to stop him by saying, (2 Chronicles 26:18-21) "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is the work of the priests alone, the descendants of Aaron who are set apart for this work. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have sinned. The Lord God will not honor you for this!"

¹⁹ "Uzziah, who was holding an incense burner, became furious. But as he was standing there raging at the priests before the incense altar in the Lord's Temple, leprosy suddenly broke out on his forehead. ²⁰ When Azariah the high priest and all the other priests saw the leprosy, they rushed him out. And the king himself was eager to get out because the Lord had struck him. ²¹ So King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in isolation in a separate house, for he was excluded from the Temple of the Lord. His son Jotham was put in charge of the royal palace, and he governed the people of the land." Ah, pride – the great destroyer.

Now back to the reference, "in the year that King Uzziah died". That year things were in chaos. Assyria and Babylon were threatening the Northern Kingdom, things were falling apart, clearly a period of transition downhill. This was the year that Isaiah received his call to office of prophet in the Temple of Jerusalem. Prophets were to speak for God to the people. They were to remind people of God's commands and warn them when they were disobeying God. You can imagine how popular that was!

The first five chapters of Isaiah (before our reading) are full of warnings because the people had forgotten God and had reverted to idolatry and all that goes with it like drinking, partying, etc. God kept sending messages of severe punishment to the people of Judah through the prophet Isaiah, but the people would not listen. Can you imagine Isaiah's frustration? And of course, the people did not want to hear him, they were too busy focusing on themselves. Isaiah had to be discouraged, really discouraged. Uzziah's throne is empty – there is no leadership. Everything is out of control.

Then we get to Chapter 6, our reading for today. Isaiah has a vision! The Lord God sitting on a throne – there is someone on the throne and there is leadership because God is in control! The Lord is high on the throne and the **hem** of his robe filled the temple. God is not *in* the temple; he is *above* it. There were two seraphim (whose name means fiery) above him, and they each had six wings! With two of the wings, they covered their feet (some commentaries indicate this means their feet and private parts so they would not be indecent), with two wings they covered their eyes so they would not see the glory of God, and with two wings they flew. Then one called to the other and they said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”. At the sound of that cry the pivots on the thresholds shook (the frame of the door shook) and the house was filled with smoke. What an amazing sight!

I am sure Isaiah was turned into a quivering bowl of jelly. “Woe is me! I am lost.” He must be wondering why the Lord has appeared to him and we know that the Old Testament says if you look at God, you will die. Isaiah now sees himself in God’s light – he sees himself as sinful which is why he says, “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!” The guilt of every big and little thing he had done wrong must have been over-whelming.

I must be honest here and say we all would be shaking in our shoes if we were suddenly standing before God and how would we see ourselves if we were standing in God’s light? Would we think of all the times we did and said things we are not proud of? Would we feel unworthy? What could we do about it? How could we show repentance?

Isaiah must have sensed something else from the Lord – maybe his love and grace? Because when the Lord sent one of the Seraphs to take a live coal from the altar with a pair of tongs and touch Isaiah’s mouth, Isaiah did not turn away even though the Seraph went to him with a live coal! A live coal so hot that the Seraph had to take it with tongs! But we don’t read that Isaiah dropped to the ground screaming in pain as we would imagine. One of the commentaries I read said that Isaiah’s sin had to be burned away but since there is no mention of pain, either there was no pain, because of a special blessing by God, or the pain did not matter because of the majesty of the surroundings and the goodness of the cleansing.

Then the Seraph said, “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out”. Isaiah was cleansed of his sins, he was purified. Just as gold must be refined with flame, then purified, the Lord had to do the same to Isaiah before he was truly ready to serve God. God removes the things that keep us from Him, that is what he did with Isaiah so when Isaiah heard the Lord say, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah did not hesitate and said, “Here am I; send me!”

What was the reason for all of this? Why would God keep threatening the people of Judah? God wanted the people to focus on him – to have faith that God was in control and would take care of them! That is what they were **not doing and not believing**.

How about us? Are we that different from the people of Judah? Honestly, things are not so bad for most of us. We have roofs over our heads, food on our table, and things are pretty peaceful in our little neighborhoods, so we feel pretty good about what we have accomplished. And it isn't like we don't know God. We go to church, and we love and trust God but are we really depending on God? Do we pray and thank God for all our blessings (the things **He** has done for us)? If not, God may take the opportunity to give us a little smack upside the head! Maybe we get sick or run into financial problems, someone we love has taken ill – oh yes, *time to pray, really pray.*

And what about our country – is it just out of control? Have we lost all hope? Have we given up? Do we just lament, "this is not the country I grew up in?" Here is a quote most of us may agree with: "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words... When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful and impatient of restraint". (Hesiod, 8th century BC). Some things never change!

We need to have faith and we need to be part of the solution, not the problem. God could come down and just straighten this world out, but He has chosen to use us – humans. "Here am I, send me." Now you may think you are too old or too busy to be part of the solution, but we can each do a little thing: perhaps donate clothes so that some young people who don't have suits to wear to an interview. If you are like me, you have multiple sizes in your closet: *This is my size now, this is the size that I used to be, this is the size I am trying to be, and this size is the impossible dream!* We have clothes that can be used – let's donate them. You can donate to a food pantry or serve in a soup kitchen, you can **vote** but when you do, make sure you know what your candidate really stands for, so they truly represent you. You can hang the American flag on your house, to indicate you are proud to be an American, you can volunteer to read at a school, sponsor a person in Teen Challenge or Bloom (Christian organizations that turn lives around from addiction), you can find other non-profits with very high rates including our own UMCOR where 100% of your donation goes to your designated site, you can send some type of "appreciation bag" to our troops (candy, books, etc.) and you can PRAY! Pray for our country, pray for peace in our world and show others the way true Christians live. We must be proud Christians and proud Americans.

A side note on Teen Challenge – I purchased one of their beautiful cutting/serving boards but it was not the one my husband really wanted so I have kept in unused for the past two months. I had the chance to stop by Teen Challenge and explained the situation and everyone we spoke to from the receptionist to the manager who oversees the woodworking design were so gracious and bent over backwards to find the board we really wanted and happily exchanged it. Christian grace and kindness overflowing! This is the grace we want to show the world.

Isaiah thought all hope was lost but God gave him a vision that cursed him, then purified him with fire, cleansing his sin, and then God used him to serve. Let us remember that we serve a

powerful God who is in control and has a plan and we need to be ready to serve in any and all ways.

This is Memorial Day weekend. May God bless the souls and the families of all who answered the call and sacrificed their lives so that we could always be a free people, so we can worship together without hiding or fear of reprisal. May we **never** forget their great sacrifice.

As I have said before and will say it again; God bless America and God bless Swift Memorial church. Amen

PS: If you don't think you can make a difference, read this note of appreciation. Bill Fortier came in on a Saturday morning to stream a celebration of life for Drew MacDonald because his daughter had to stay home with her daughter due to a serious illness.

