

One of the many things that I’ve learned as a parent of small children is that if you are saving something for a special occasion, you need to set it apart. For example, if you have some food that you are saving for a party, you need to set it up high on a shelf. You need to set it apart. The word “holy” means “set apart.” In our lesson for today, the angels say that God is holy. God is set apart. But we’ll also see today that God sets us apart for service. **The Holy God Sets Us Apart for Service.**

Our passage for today begins, **“In the year that King Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1).** King Uzziah had reigned 52 years. Such a long reign helped to provide stability to the kingdom of Judah. The kingdom prospered under his reign. There was plenty of food to eat. Most importantly he was a godly king. Except for one incident toward the end of his reign. King Uzziah went into the temple of the LORD and burned incense even though God had said that that only the priests should do that. But King Uzziah had become arrogant and he thought that he could do that. God struck him with leprosy. King Uzziah repented and he was forgiven. But the leprosy stayed and he had to spend the rest of his life in a secluded house. It was a reminder to the people of Judah not to put their trust in humans, even a good and godly king like Uzziah. Instead, we should put our trust in God, the true King.

Isaiah says, **“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim” (Isaiah 6:1-2).** Seraphim are angels. The word seraphim comes from a Hebrew word which means “fire” or “flame.” And so these angels probably had a fiery appearance. They were worshiping God by calling to one another: **“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook” (Isaiah 6:3-4).** One commentators compared this it to this: Have you ever been in a sports stadium when the crowd was so loud that the stadium seemed like it was shaking? That’s what the worship of the angels was like. We sing these same words in our worship services before Jesus’ words of institution for communion. We will sing them later today.

So let’s take a look at this song of the angels: **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty” (Isaiah 6:3).** Remember “holy” means “set apart.” Think about all the ways in which God is set apart from us. Think about all the ways in which he is different than we are. He is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He is the Creator. He created us but nobody created him. He is almighty. He created this entire universe. We grow tired and weary. He never gets tired. Isaiah talks about this later in his book when he says, **“With whom, then, will you compare God?” (40:18). “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and it people are like grasshoppers” (40:22). ‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. ‘Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom” (Isaiah 40:28).**

The Israelites were constantly tempted to put their trust in humans or in idols. And Isaiah is saying, “Why do that? Put your trust in God. He does not grow tired or weary and he will renew the strength of those who are tired and weary. Isaiah goes on in chapter 40, **“He gives strength to the weary ... Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:29-31).** God is set apart as our almighty Creator. He doesn’t grow tired or weary like we do. He isn’t limited in his abilities like we are. We can trust in him.

Another way in which God is holy, set apart, is that God does not have any sin. He is sinless. We are sinful. Isaiah realized this and it frightened him. He says, **“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” (Isaiah 6:5).** We have every reason to think that Isaiah was a very righteous man. And if Isaiah says, **“Woe to me! I am ruined!”** then what about all of us? And notice the sin that Isaiah identifies. He identifies sins of speech. **“Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5).** We have unclean lips when we gossip. We have unclean lips when we curse or use filthy

language. We have unclean lips when we use our words to hurt others. We have unclean lips when we hurt the reputation of others behind their backs. Christ's brother James said, **"The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell"** (James 3:6). That's why Isaiah said, **"Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips"** (Isaiah 6:5).

Isaiah confessed his sin and God had mercy on him. It says, **"Then one of the seraphim 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 6:6-7). The seraph took the coal from the altar, the place of sacrifice. On the cross Jesus made the sacrifice for your sins. Your guilt is taken away. Your sin is atoned for. Notice that forgiveness is applied directly to Isaiah. The coal touches his lips so that Isaiah knew for sure that this forgiveness was for him. That same personal forgiveness is given to you when you confess your sins to a fellow Christian and they say to you, "You are forgiven." That same personal forgiveness is applied to you when you take Holy Communion and in a miraculous way Christ's body and blood touches your lips and you hear him say, "This is my body, given for you." "This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Isaiah experienced that personal forgiveness when the burning coal from the altar touched his mouth and he heard the words of the angel telling him that his guilt had been taken away and his sin had been atoned for.

The grace and mercy and forgiveness of God inspired him to volunteer for service. It says, **"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 6:8). Isaiah would now be set apart for service. The same lips that had been unclean would now be set apart to speak God's word. In our gospel for today, Jesus called Peter, James and John to leave their boats and be fishers of people. Still today, Jesus calls people into the public ministry to speak his word on behalf of a congregation. But even if you're not in the public ministry, God has still set you apart for service. God has set all Christians apart for service. God has set all of us apart for the special task of speaking God's word to our neighbor. The apostle Peter said, **"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"** (1 Peter 2:9). Think of how Isaiah used his mouth to speak the good news. Isaiah said that the Savior would be born of a virgin. He said, **"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son"** (Isaiah 7:14). He said, **"To us a child is born, to us a son is given"** (Isaiah 9:6). Isaiah said that the Savior would proclaim good news to the poor and set the oppressed free (Isaiah 61:1-2). Perhaps the clearest statement of the good news which Isaiah would make is in Isaiah 53. **"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"** (Isaiah 53:5-6).

We are also set apart to speak those same truths to those around us. It's not going to be easy. It wasn't easy for Isaiah. In the verses right after our passage God tells Isaiah that most will reject his message. But some people would believe the good news and they also would be set apart for service. We believers have been set apart for service. And God's grace inspires our service. Amen.