

**Isaiah 6:1-8**  
**February 6, 2022**  
**The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” <sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup>And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for 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!” <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” <sup>8</sup>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!”

In the year that King Uzziah died, or on the day President Kennedy was shot, or when the planes hit the towers and the Pentagon, or in March of 2020 when we shut everything down, or on the day that my mother died, or that day that I stood at the edge of the Grand Canyon, or when they first took that child wrapped in a pink blanket and put her in my arms. There are moments, moments that are so tragic, or so overwhelming, or so wonderful, or so awesome, moments when time stands still. And although the clocks start to tick again and our hearts start to beat again, we know that something has changed and we won't ever really be the same. This passage is how it happened to the prophet Isaiah in about the year 740 BCE. He was in the temple in Jerusalem and something happened.

When has that happened to you? A moment when the world around you faded away, when the clocks seemed to stop, when your very heart seemed to stop for a moment. For Isaiah it was in the temple, and he had a vision of God and these fiery beings called seraphim. This passage may be familiar to you and Isaiah response to God can sound familiar because of the hymn that we

will sing in just a bit, “Here I Am, Lord.” I think this is the favorite hymn of a lot of people. But I want us today to be aware of something in this passage that is often overlooked. Isaiah has a vision of the holiness of God. When we have those moments of wonder, of amazement, of the awesomeness of creation, any moment that time just sort of stands still, how do you feel? Do you feel that events are so much bigger than you? Do you feel small in the midst of creation’s grandeur? Do you feel that you are not worthy? Do you feel lost? When Isaiah has his vision in the temple, notice what his reaction is—“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King.” Perhaps part of the human condition when we are touched by something greater than ourselves is to realize how small we are. If you stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon, you have an experience of the vastness of nature and at the same time you realize that you are quite small in comparison. When you are handed that small bundle of humanity for the first time and you become a parent, part of what you feel is unworthiness, that you have no idea what you are really doing. And maybe you have an experience like Isaiah’s, of your own sinfulness. You are not perfect, you make mistakes, you sometimes even do things that you know are wrong. The church calls and asks you to be an elder or a deacon and your first response is, “why would they ask me? Don’t they know? If they knew, they would never ask.” I am a person of unclean lips . . .

We all have experiences of our own sinfulness, times when we realize that we missed the mark, time when we know we don’t measure up. That’s ok, we’re supposed to have to have those times. But what’s really important is that we listen to what God’s response is. He doesn’t send Isaiah out saying, “You’re right, get out. Come back when you’re a better person. Instead, before God asks him to do anything, he forgives him, he cleanses him, Isaiah has an experience of the grace of God.

Some of you, like me, remember the early 1970s and how we sat in front of our TVs and watch the Watergate hearings. As a teenager it was amazing to me to watch the downfall of a president. But one of the cast of characters in that drama was a man who interested me in later years, Chuck Colson. Charles Colson worked as a Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon between 1969 and 1973. He was known as the most ruthless man in Washington. He became known as the president's "Hatchet Man" for his willingness to do his dirty work for him. Colson also was the first member of Nixon's cabinet to be imprisoned for Watergate-related crimes.

In 1973, however, Colson had a conversion experience, not unlike the prophet Isaiah's. The forgiven former "Hatchet Man" heard and faithfully responded to God's call to work on God's behalf with and for prisoners. His Prison Fellowship Ministry arguably did so much to raise Christians' (as well as others') awareness of the need for more humane treatment of people who are incarcerated. Reflecting on his conversion, Colson later wrote "I left [the Raytheon Company's president, Tom Phillips'] house that night [of my conversion] shaken by the words he had read from C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* about pride. It felt as if Lewis were writing about me, former Marine captain, Special Counsel to the President of the United States, now in the midst of the Watergate scandal. I had an overwhelming sense that I was unclean.

"After talking to Tom, I found that when I got to the automobile to drive away, I couldn't. I was crying too hard – and I was not one to ever cry. I spent an hour calling out to God. I did not even know the right words. I simply knew that I wanted Him. And I knew for certain that the God who created the universe heard my cry.

"From the next morning to this day, I have never looked back. I can honestly say that the worst day of the last 35 years has been better than the best days of the 41 years that preceded it. That's

a pretty bold statement, given my time in prison, three major surgeries, and two kids with cancer at the same time, but it is absolutely true.

“That’s because, for the last 35 years – whether in pain, suffering, joy, or jubilation, it makes no difference – I have known there was a purpose. I have known that I belong to Christ and that I am here on earth to advance His Kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

He knew that he was loved and forgiven. All of us need forgiveness, and it is perhaps the ultimate sign of love, when one can offer forgiveness. Frederick Buechner says:

To forgive somebody is to say one way or another, "You have done something unspeakable, and by all rights I should call it quits between us. Both my pride and my principles demand no less. However, although I make no guarantees that I will be able to forget what you've done, and though we may both carry the scars for life, I refuse to let it stand between us. I still want you for my friend."<sup>2</sup>

That’s exactly what God is telling us. God still wants us. God forgives us. And God forgives us first. We don’t have to go out and do anything to be worthy of us. We are forgiven out of love, the never ending love of God. Now what are we going to do about forgiving one another?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://descant.wordpress.com/2008/08/25/chuck-colson-reflects-on-his-conversion/>:

<sup>2</sup> Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking*.