

**Isaiah 6:1-8 O.T. 597 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>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!”

**Isaiah 6:1-8 N.T. Page 597**  
**“Willingness”**

**Opening Prayer:** Please bow with me in prayer. O God, we come into your presence today to learn your ways. Open our minds, and soften our hearts, so we can hear and understand what you have to say to us today. In Jesus’ Name, **Amen.**

**Introduction:** In the spring of 1976, like most college students just wrapping up their first year, I was looking for a summer job to make a few bucks to help with my living expenses. **I’d heard of a company** in Pittsburgh that was looking for students to **color mine maps**. This was back in the days before computers, CAD software, and color printers. Back then, all mine maps were **hand drawn** and copies were made using a **blueprint** machine. But of course, a blueprint machine only printed in blue and white, while most complex mine maps were color-coded. If a customer wanted 15 copies of a map, 15 blueprints had to be hand colored. **So I worked** in a whole room full of summer-students diligently coloring maps to match a master copy hanging on the wall. Any grade-schooler could have done this work, but the job paid minimum wage, and I needed the money.

The second day on the job, while the whole bunch of us were busily coloring maps, **an old gentlemen** walked into the room and asked, **“Can anyone help me do some calculations?”** I liked math and figured it would be a change of pace, so I raised my hand and volunteered, and off I went to do some calculations. It turned out this old gentleman was a worldwide expert in **coal processing** and over the next couple of years before he retired, he taught me all about his profession. I never colored another mine map and **ended up working** in the coal-processing field for the next 25 years. I had had no prior experience in coal processing, and I wasn’t studying coal processing in school, in fact, I couldn’t have even told you what coal processing was. It all happened, **simply because I was willing.**

**PAUSE**

**Move I.**

**First, we need to be willing to recognize God as God.** God is, and God was, and God always will be. Before anything and everything God already was. **God's the great "I AM"** (Exodus 3:14). God's existence precedes all existences. God was the creator of the heavens and the earth. **And God is.** God is the giver and sustainer of all life. You're alive, and I'm alive, and everyone's alive because of God's act of giving us life and sustaining that life. And God always will be. **When we reach the end** of our days, God will be there to usher us into eternity. We are mortal, but God is immortal, and God offers to let us share in God's own immortality. Because God always will be, we too always can be.

Some of you followed what I just said about God, **while to others of you** it all sounded like a bunch of double talk. That's because I described God using **metaphysical terms**. Metaphysics is the study of what is real, and what is ultimate reality? In metaphysical terms, **God is the ultimate reality**. But try as we might, **we just can't** seem to wrap our minds around God. That's why we can get twisted up by what sounds like double talk. Knowing God is never simply an intellectual kind of knowing; **knowing God is always** a spiritual kind of knowing.

**Now to stand here** this morning and talk about what it means to recognize God as God is in many ways **like preaching to the choir**. Most of you here either on-line or in-person today are here most Sundays. **Last year, 369 people** chose to worship God along with us at least once. Now if all those people showed up at the same time we wouldn't know where to put them all, but that's how many people came at least one. **On average 110** people worship with us each Sunday. **And 132 people**, including most of you with us today, worship with us at least one Sunday out of every three. **You are the people** who recognize the importance of gathering regularly to worship and praise God. **Atheist**—people who don't believe there is a God, don't gather to worship God. But you do!

**Turing to our trusty *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Second Edition***, because where else could you possibly look for a working definition of the word God, we find:

**God—the Supreme Being who is creator and ruler of the universe.  
Christians believe God is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons and one God.**

To believe this is to recognize God as God, not because we're so smart we figured this out all on our own, but because this is what God has told us about Himself.

And then the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* goes on to make an especially important point saying, **“God created humans in the divine image”** (Genesis 1:26). Yet, while we are indeed like God, we are not God. **This is where Buddhist** get crossed up. Buddhists believe that ultimate reality is that we are all God, but our problem is that we don't recognize that. **That's** not what we believe.

**Our Bible lesson** today opens with the prophet Isaiah's vision of the throne room in heaven. Isaiah writes, **“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple”** (Isaiah 6:1b, NRSV). Words will never be adequate to describe what Isaiah saw, even artist's renditions fall short. **And then the seraphim** who encircle the throne call out, **“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isaiah 6:3b, NIV). That's what God is, God is Holy, **in Hebrew**, God is “qadosh,” **in Latin**, God is “Sanctus,” **and in English**, God is “holy.” **God is high and lifted up.** God is exalted. God is awe-inspiring. God is worthy of our worship, and praise, and admiration. **God is wholly**, that's w-h-o-l-l-y, other. **Yes, first, and foremost, we need to be willing to recognize that God is God.**

**End I.**

**Move II.**

**Then we need to be willing to see ourselves for who we really are.** The great philosophers throughout history have always taught the importance of knowing one's self. **The Greek philosophers** Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato frequently quoted that great Greek maxim, or aphorism, "*Know Thyself.*" This nugget of wisdom is one of the so-called "**Delphic Maxims**" inscribed on the stone pillars of Apollo's temple at Delphi in Greece. These include classic sayings such as, "**use time sparingly,**" "**govern your expenses,**" and "**venture into danger prudently.**" But the maxim "**know thyself**" is a **two-edged sword**. It can cut both ways. It can lead to good or it can lead to bad.

On one hand, knowing one's own self can lead you to ignore the foolish opinions of others, which can be good. **When I was growing** up in public school, I was one of those kids who excelled in math, but **wasn't any good at spelling**. Teachers kept telling to **spell words the way they sounded**, but I quickly realized what I heard, and what other people heard, weren't the same thing. From an early age, I was fully aware that I was a poor speller. That's part of the reason I developed a **love of dictionaries**. I knew that any word I couldn't spell, and there were a lot of them, I could look up in the dictionary. **One day** during my senior year in high school, my poor spelling so exasperated **my English teacher** that in frustration she blurted out, "***You'll never amount to anything, if you can't spell.***" That might have devastated some kids, but not me. I knew who I was. I knew my strengths and weaknesses. So, I quickly replied, "***I'll just hire a secretary who can!***" You should have seen the **big smile** on my English teacher's face. Yes, knowing yourself can be good.

**But on the other hand**, knowing yourself can lead you to think of yourself more highly than you ought. Rather than seeing yourself as a person uniquely gifted by God to help others, you think as yourself as God's gift to humanity.

**Back when I was in grade school** in the 1960's, Cassious Clay was a young cocky boxer who rose to fame overnight. Cassious Clay invented trash talking in sports. **In pre-fight press conferences**, Clay would talk about how his face was too pretty to get cut, while running through a whole litany of pain he was going to inflict on his opponent. **After having defeated Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier, and George Forman**, Cassious Clay, **who changed his name** to Muhammad Ali after converting to Islam in 1975, for more than a decade became the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. He took to calling himself, **“The Greatest.”** But **“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18, NRSV). **In his final years, Muhammad Ali**, who died in 2016, suffered with Parkinson's disease and couldn't even dress himself, let alone afflict pain on his opponents. The greatest there had even been just wasn't so great anymore. Yes, knowing yourself can make you arrogant and conceited, and that can be bad.

**Once again**, turning to our Bible lesson today, we see Isaiah quickly come to terms with himself. **Compared to the greatness**, and splendor, and utter holiness of God, Isaiah knows he's nothing. **In Isaiah 6:5** (paraphrase) Isaiah cries out, **“Woe to Me! I'm doomed! I'm as good as dead! Every word I've ever spoken is tainted—blasphemous even! And the people I live with are just as messed up as me. And I have looked in the face of God.”** When you come face-to-face with God's utter holiness, **the only realistic self-assessment** is that you just don't stack up. And yet God used Isaiah's unclean lips to speak God holy word. **Like Isaac Watts** back in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century in his **hymn** *“Alas and Did My Savior Bleed”* each of us needs to be amazed that God has a use for **“such a worm as I.”** We may be laid low, but we're still loved by God. We need to face God. **And then we do need to be willing to see ourselves for who we really are.**

**End II.**

**Move III.**

**And finally, we need to be willing to do what God asks. Faith isn't so much** about understanding with your head, **as it is about acting with your heart.** You think God's thoughts after Him, **and then God does His actions** through you. Your life is no longer your own. **You become** the hands and the feet, and the lips and words, and the life and the breath of God to people all around you.

**James the son of Zebedee**, one of the three disciples in Jesus' inner circle, puts it this way, **“But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith”** (James 2:18, NRSV). **Actions always speak louder words**, and words are most meaningful when accompanied by consistent actions. **God encourages us** not only to do as Jesus said, but also **to do as Jesus did.**

**Our Bible Lesson** today is *“Isaiah's Call Narrative.”* Isaiah is sharing the story of when God called him to do something for God, and he obeyed. There are many such call narratives in the Bible, the call narratives for **Samuel**, and **Jeremiah**, **and Jonah**, and **Amos**, **and Paul**. The question each of us face when God calls, is how we will respond? Will we do as God asks? Or will we make some excuse and ignore God's request? **Isaiah was God's prophet** during the reign of four kings in the southern kingdom of Judah during the second half of the eighth century B.C. some 2,750 years ago. In Isaiah's case, it begins by God asking a question. **In Isaiah 6:8a** (NRSV) Isaiah hears God asked, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”** Now Isaiah could have treated that as a rhetorical question. God was asking, but God wasn't really expecting anyone to answer. All I can say, is God doesn't waste His breath like that. If God asks, God's expecting an answer. **And Isaiah's answer was “Here am I; send me!”** (Isaiah 6:8b, NRSV). **How will you answer** when you hear God's call?

V

**Today as we presented** our tithes and offerings to God, Corey Meyers sang a song he wrote not long ago called, “*You Are the Way.*” In his song Corey says that it’s not enough to know the Lord, you need to trust the Lord. You need to set aside your doubts and trust the Lord to show you the way. It’s going on four years now since we started our “*Light for the City*” worship service **and Corey** was the second member of our worship team. Corey and Brandon Gibbs were friends, and both were part of **Erie Young Adults**, which has since fallen by the wayside, that had been a ministry of Erie First Assembly up on Oliver Road in Mill Creek Township. A lot has happened in those four years. **Corey graduated** from Edinboro University with a degree in English and now he’s finished his first year at **Ashland Theological Seminary** in Kentucky. Corey has been living into the words of his own song. He’s trusting the Lord to show him the way. Like Isaiah in our Bible Lesson today, Corey has heard the Lord’s call and responded, “*Here am I; send me!*” (Isaiah 6:8b, NRSV). That’s willingness!

**One of the questions** that Ashland Seminary asks as part of its application process is: “*As you understand it today, where you are in the journey toward your calling?*” **Corey grew up Catholic**, he’d been part of his church’s youth group. While at Edinboro University he participated in **McLane’s Young Adults, EYA**, and in Edinboro’s **Chi Alpha** campus ministry. He’s gone on mission trips to **Nicaragua** and **Puerto Rico**. Corey is very much in the process of discovering and living out his call. **Here’s the last sentence** of Corey’s answer to Ashland’s admission question. “*It is through God, with God, and for God that I live my life and through my faith, God will get me to where I am called to be and equip me for what He has called me to do.*” **That’s trust. That’s willingness. It’s never enough to** hear the Word, we must also do what it says (James 1:22). **We really do need to be willing to do what God asks.**

**End III.**

**Conclusion:** I ended up working in the coal-processing field for 25 years because I took a minimum wage job coloring mine maps and volunteered when an old gentleman asked if anyone would help him do some calculations. Yes, a major chunk of my life happened simply because I was willing. **Yet first, and foremost in our lives, we need to be willing to recognize that God is God.** God is God, and we're not. God is exalted. God is awe-inspiring. God is worthy of our worship, and praise, and admiration. Yes, God is wholly, w-h-o-l-l-y, other. **And then we do need to be willing to see ourselves for who we really are.** As the ancient Greeks taught, "know thyself," not to be arrogant or conceited, but to be realistic about your strengths and weaknesses. **And finally, we really do need to be willing to do what God asks.** God's questions aren't rhetorical questions. When God asks, God's expecting an answer. Like Isaiah we need to answer eagerly, "*Here am I; send me!*" It all comes down to "***Willingness.***"

**Closing Prayer:** Let's pray. Lord, you are able, make us able too. Able to respond to your call. Able to do what you ask. May the primary attitude of our lives be one of "***Willingness.***" **Amen!**

**Sending Forth:** Do you like to whine and complain? Has your life been one missed opportunity after another? Then you need to answer when God asks you a question. Go forth with an attitude of "***Willingness***" to be of service to God. **And all of God's People said...Amen!**