

Isaiah 6:1-8  
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“Worship Wherever You Are”

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The story of Isaiah begins with the prophet describing a vision of the dust of human ugliness. The opening scene depicts Judah and Jerusalem as rebellious children who act as if they have never heard of God; it reveals corruption, iniquity, compounded by disregard for God or life, and an “us” first attitude that creates needless divisions. Isaiah suggests the world of his day has become sick in both head and heart.

In the first words he offers, Isaiah tries to sprinkle in a few messages of hope; but they always seem to circle around to judgement. He speaks of God’s house returning, but when? He tells of a day the people will be singing songs, but that is in some foggy future. This day the only clarity in his vision is of a very sinful, corrupted, disloyal world.

We become tempted to see the world this way too. Hopeless. The partisan TV ads are already running as they drive up our blood pressure. Pressure to produce more and more at work, and in life increases stress, strong relationships becoming estranged, difficult people invade our day, and that’s not even to mention society issues; pointless violence out of control, war and rumors of war, prejudice, poverty, where does it all end. Life isn’t really this bad, but when we are weary it is easy to lose hope.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter everything changes for Isaiah. In his moment of utter despair Isaiah is blessed by a vision he receives in worship. The first thing we see here is, Isaiah is ready to worship God, anytime, anywhere. While he is surprised by the scene, there is no sense that he resisted the unfolding of the divine right before his eyes. Isaiah shows us how important it is to worship God anywhere and anytime. We may be in the middle of our workday, but we can take a minute to pray. We may be waiting for our Memorial Day parade to start and see a beautiful cloud drift by. Healing, joy, comfort, forgiveness, we always need to take time to thank God. Have you ever discovered yourself singing a favorite Christian song or hymn, don’t quit in embarrassment, go on and belt it out. Look at the opportunity Isaiah would have missed if he didn’t pause to worship... he would have missed God’s vocational call to him, missed God’s purpose for his life.

Then we look to the content of God’s vision. Just as Isaiah finds himself drowning in the sinfulness of life, he is given a vision of the tremendous beauty of God. The temple appears flush with light, and filled with winged creatures flying around with forgiveness and blessing. This temple was fully soaked in God’s presence, fully alive with God’s power, fully forgiven by God’s grace. Hope and Healing are the air at a time when they seem impossible.

We also note that Isaiah quickly joins with the worship that has already been going on. The organ did not strike up just because it was 9:25am and the music and praise won’t end just because the hour is up. The reason we can join in worship anytime and anyplace is because in heaven, the Saints of God are worshipping constantly, 24/7, 365.

As the scene unfolds more we see how Isaiah, being caught up in God's awesome presence recognizes that it is not only the world which is sinful, he himself isn't perfect either. He sometimes falls short, sometimes tries to do the right thing with an unfortunate, unintended result. In that moment of worship he recognizes he can't sit high and mighty on a seat of judgement about everyone else without examining himself. As Isaiah confesses we learn God's seraph flies through with painful but good news, by the touch of a burning coal to his lips the prophet's sins are forgiven.

When we are truly forgiven we no longer allow the injustice, sin or harm that was done to us, control us. When we are truly forgiven we are set free to pursue the life path God has set before us. When we are truly forgiven, we are able to love ourselves and others, imperfections and all, with the kind of Love Jesus embodied, love of friend, love of stranger, love of enemy.

Finally, as with Isaiah, all worship leads us to thank God by serving others. Every Sunday right after the Postlude at the end of the bulletin at St. Peter United Church of Christ in Stone Church, IL, the church where my dad served as pastor for over 25 years, the first announcement always read, "Enter to worship, Depart to serve." It was a weekly way of saying, like Isaiah and others in the bible, "Here I am, Lord, Send me." I have been filled by your grace and mercy, I have been renewed in this time, send me into the world to share your divine love and hope.

One day last week I walked to Culver's for a bite to eat. As I was walking back I decided to return to church by the side road which goes behind the church on the edge of Whitnall Park. The trees were flush with deep green leaves, and the creek that runs under the Highway was flowing fast.

I stopped and watched the water, I listened to it rumble over the rocks. The sky was blue and the bright sun was warm on my back. On what had been a rough day, I suddenly found my spirits raised at the beauty I had found just a few feet away from the rushing, honking traffic and construction cones... there I found this wonderful and wondrous beauty in the middle of near hysteria, at a moment I least expected it.

As I walked back to church a beautiful old car rumbled carefully by me. It was well cared for and nicely restored. With my interest in cars, I found my heart jumping for joy again. My first reaction was, "Wow this is a lucky day."

Then I thought, maybe not luck... instead God had sent opportunities which overflowed into giving thanks. That's worship!

As I walked back to church I wondered, how many times had I missed these gifts of God? Could it be that God is constantly sending gifts of beauty, joy and healing and often I am just not open to them? How often had God sent opportunities for me to become inspired and called into service and I had missed those also.

I hope we will all learn to look for God's temple. It's there and we deeply need to experience it, offer thanks to God, and share our stories with others. How will we know we have found it? We will find God in the artistry of creation, in the creativity of art, in unexpected acts of kindness, and overwhelming compassion. We will find God in people, places and events.

As we do this; a new vision will open to us. We will see more good in people than bad. We will see more helping than self-centeredness. We will see more sharing than hoarding. We will discover a growing ability to find God and share with others the joy and mystery God pours into each moment of life.

And when we experience the light of Hope, and the joy it gives, we will begin to see our suffering brothers and sisters more clearly.

Worship helps us grow the gift of Compassion. When we appreciate the beauty of nature, we understand more clearly why we need to protect it. When we appreciate the beauty in each other, we discover justice and peace are not entitlements, they are universal gifts.

Richard Bausch captures the awesomeness of God when he observed, "He turned in a small circle and looked at the grass, the rocks, the river, the raining sky with its tatters and torn places, the shining bark of the wet trees all around. He could not think of any prayers now. But every movement felt like a kind of adoration."

In the week ahead may we be open to encounter the movements and moments which become "Adoration."

Amen