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Isaiah's Vision
Feb 6, 2022 Epiph 5C Isaiah 6

Now, my brain can understand a good many things – I can understand the concept of the planet Earth, that it has continents and seas, countries and peoples, history, and such. My brain can learn about our solar system, that planets exist around our sun, that light is thrown out by the medium-sized star that is the center of this system - although my mind has started to boggle at light years and conceiving the sizes of planets and the incredible distances between them. I can learn the data that our solar system is but a part of the Milky Way galaxy, and that billions of stars can be seen by our naked eyes, and many more by our telescopes. The distances involved are beyond my imagination, although I can look at photographs those telescopes take, and read the charts about this galaxy. I can even look at the pictures that indicate many of those stars are actually more galaxies and believe it, and take in that our cosmos is so huge that its limits are unknown although it's incredible. I can hear scientists & astronomers talk about forces that say the universe is expanding, but the math and concepts are beyond me. The same with looking into the smaller and smaller units of matter - cells and atoms and DNA and RNA and smaller and smaller - about all the room between atoms....I can learn about it, but understanding it gets beyond me quickly, too.

And these things are just what science has found about God's creation - it's not even approaching the vastness and expansiveness of the God who is life and light and truth, and created all this! How in the world can our finite, limited brains and senses take in all the enormity and otherness of the Divine One? If we try and say we understand God, we already know that we haven't understood a thing. Every time we sit down and let our spiritual senses stretch out to try and imagine all that is God, we bump into the limits of our humanity. A fave poem by e e cummings asks, *How should tasting touching hearing seeing breathing any - lifted from the no of all nothing - human merely being doubt unimaginable You?*

So it's been up to God to reveal Godself through various means....what we manage to know of God is because God has chosen to reveal Godself to us. Through creation, for example, the work of God's hands, in its infinite variety, in the pulsing of life emerging again and again, in the expansiveness of the macro universe and the micro universe - both ends of the realm still being discovered (although not understanding) - the play of light and color, the movements of the

winds and weathers, the mysteriousness of birth and death - the LIFE that God called into being fascinates us. God is revealed through the Law of Moses, revealed to a nomadic tribe that eventually became the Jewish people, chosen to walk with God and help bless the world with the words of God. God is revealed more through Jesus, who spoke and acted in this human realm yet in perfect union with God, teaching, healing, extending welcome, being killed, and made alive again.

And sometimes God is apprehended through the direct encounter of visionary experiences, where images of what is beyond imaging try and hold together the holiness, the magnitude, the awesomeness, the mystery, the unexplainable that is God - who yet desires to communicate with humans. Isaiah's vision is a well-known one to those of us who grew up in Sunday School classes and hearing Scripture read in worship. A commentator called this a "Spielberg-worthy scene" (Working Preacher) of odd beings, unknown songs of praise, unapproachable splendor, and a great shaking.

This vision contains the responses of true worship - fearsome awe of a Divine holiness that throws us to the ground and causes us to cry out our sinfulness and the sinfulness of all humanity - *Woe is me*, Isaiah says, *for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips*... Now that's a valid response to the overwhelming nature of encountering God. God is overwhelming, God's holiness calls all else into question, God's life reveals all that is anti-life, God's true light shows up every speck of dirt or dust. This is what Scripture means when it says that *the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*. God alone is God - and we are not. We feel the divide, we are thrown off our feet and onto our faces. We know ourselves as created creatures, a little less than the angels, as the Psalms put it. Isaiah is amazed that he encounters God and still lives, because God is that overwhelming and awesome. Mind-blowing might be a good word.

In Isaiah's vision, the odd creature called a seraph follows up Isaiah's cry about unclean lips, and brings a coal to cleanse those very lips. See, God provides the cure, God provides the way we are restored, forgiven, cleansed. Isaiah didn't slave over some task or achieve anything with his own extreme efforts - God provided the restoration of relationship. God declares us forgiven, raises us up. It's always God who is the seeker of people, the revealer of Godself to people - it's not our climbing the highest mountain or completing horrendous labors. It's always God who first loves us, difficult as that is to accept. When people talk about how they "found

God,” it’s always because God was initiating things. We don’t find God - God seeks and finds us.

Again, this is true worship - the encounter with all that is God, the realization of our own limits, our own shortsightedness and self-interest, the humbling of our pride and acceptance of our place in the great scheme of things - our confession that we are not God and have a brokenness before God’s perfection; and THEN God’s reaching out to us in love, acceptance, welcome, forgiveness, and our restoration of relationship. Gratitude comes after this, gratitude is for our restoration, that we are granted the means of knowing God and not dying.

Next in Isaiah's vision and worship of God is the hearing of God’s voice asking him to serve in this revelation of God to humanity, to serve in whatever means we have, to humbly give ourselves to that right relationship with God and whatever it asks of us. *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* It's not really specific, is it? There’s no detail of what it will mean to go for God. It’s a huge ask, asking for our whole person, our whole life, our whole attention, our whole love; to be re-oriented to the deep truth of things, to begin to learn the wisdom in living in right-relationship with everything, including with God, nature, others, and self.

Our worshipful response again to this tugging at our heart is, like Isaiah’s, *Here I am, send me*. Whatever, wherever, whoever, I’m all in. Send me. I can do no other but commit to God and God’s rightness. I’ll serve you; I’ll learn your words and follow your ways. I’ll tell about you to people. I will belong to you, heart and soul.

In worship, God confronts us, God challenges us, God comforts us, God calls us. Worship is the soul standing naked before its creator, its God; accepting that what God says is right, accepting that how God says to order our lives is how we will order our lives.

We don’t see the whole journey, with its pitfalls, its challenges, its blessings, its mountains or its valleys. We aren’t able to take in the whole of God’s reality, nor even what it means in terms of the days and hours of our lives - there’s no revelation of what we will do or be or take on or endure or celebrate. But we know it’s a whole-life thing, that we will stand with God and God will stand with us. We will never be the same; it’s like being reborn into a new consciousness, a new paradigm - it’s stepping into God’s kingdom, God’s realm, God’s reality. Once we’ve experienced it, seen it, heard it, whatever word we use - we are changed from deep within. It will take at least the rest of our human years to make any headway - mostly because

the more our eyes take in, the more we are humbled, and the more we realize how much God needs to change in us.

Living this life following Christ, our spiritual call, is the most important work we will ever take on; it demands our whole life, our whole mind, our whole strength, our whole commitment. It's both the most simple thing yet the most challenging and complex - and hard. Because it's a complete re-orienting of our reason to be, our existence; it calls into question everything we've learned in our life in the world - it reveals what we've known of life in the world for the falsehood that it is. The way of life, God's life, reveals what we took for granted as life for being the way of death.

Our call as a people of God is to learn to live and walk in this new reality, and show this renewed living, this right living, to the rest of the world. Not to co-opt the ways of the world into our churches; but to recognize the ways of death - and live differently. One of the ways we are strengthened for this work is through this celebration of the sacrament of communion - a repetition of the truth of our connectedness and oneness with each other and with God and with all God's creation that will pervade our consciousness and carry over into the rest of our hours. We celebrate this sacrament, this holy ritual, today again, adding to the layers of spiritual muscle memory, adding to the repetition of the words of institution; and taking in God. May this meal once again work the Spirit's power in our lives and enliven our living, nurture our souls.

AMEN.