

Holy Trinity B 2024 Isaiah 6:1-8

Twenty-some years ago there was a TV show called Trading Spaces where neighbors would remodel a room in each others' houses over the weekend on a shoe-string budget with the help of quirky interior designers. At the beginning of each show, the homeowners would say what they didn't want done to their house—certain colors or styles, not painting woodwork or furniture, for example—then part of most episodes revolved around the designers ignoring those wishes and the couples wondering if their neighbors would still speak to them after the big reveal. And for good reason: in one particularly memorable episode, the designer covered an entire bedroom wall with live moss. Back then, I thought this was highly entertaining reality TV; but now, having bought a home that may have previously been owned by a big fan of this show, I recognize it for the crime drama it was. Though not the first Do It Yourself program, it did contribute to that trend, which can get out of control. Being able to do things for ourselves is good, but our culture of rugged individualism, when taken too far, shames us unfairly for not being able to do everything: rewire our own houses to illuminate our own artwork that decorates the walls of our kitchens where we prepare gourmet meals from ingredients we've grown or raised ourselves—or at the very least that we drove home from the grocery store in cars that we can fix ourselves, even if they run on about as many computer chips as the space shuttle. How dare we consult a professional instead of brewing our own beer, fixing our own plumbing, curing our own illnesses, and turning all our hobbies into small businesses that we manage and market ourselves. The pressure to know how to do it all—and to somehow have the time and energy to do it all—can make us feel like failures, when in reality what we are is just human. Scripture is full of people discovering human limitations the hard way; or in other words, learning that God is God, and we are not.

Our passage from Isaiah begins with one of those biblical characters who learned the hard way. King Uzziah had a role to play as the political ruler of Judah, but he tried to take over temple rituals that were only to be performed by consecrated priests. Uzziah's death was the consequence of transgressing the boundary between what was secular and what was sacred. So it's not false humility when—six chapters in, after he has already been prophesying—Isaiah sees this vision of the Lord and says, “Woe is me! I am sinful, and I live among sinful people. How can I see the Lord?” No wonder he is overwhelmed. Close your eyes for a minute if it will help you envision what Isaiah saw. Imagine the great temple; just the *hem* of the Lord's *robe* fills the whole room. The building shakes and fills with smoke at the sound of the angels who are not, as we read elsewhere, the men in dazzling white clothing, nor the chubby baby cupids of baroque art. The word *seraph* is best translated as *fiery serpent*. Flaming snakes with wings: terrifying. And these

burning, flying snakes use their wings to cover themselves and their faces because *they* can't look directly at the glory of the Lord. Isaiah is purified through fire so he can answer the Lord's call: *Here I am; send me!* Either in the awesome, fearsome, holy presence of the Lord he can do nothing but obey, or he wants to get away from the flying snakes.

Trinity Sunday is the only festival for a theological doctrine instead of for a person or event. We find Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in many different places in scripture, sometimes even all together in the same passage of scripture, but never the word *Trinity*, which came much later. The Trinity is less who God is than how early theologians tried to *explain* who God is. Of course, any explanation is going to be an over-simplification; if we could define, understand, or fully see God, then God wouldn't be God. To claim otherwise would be crossing that boundary—trying to *be* God instead of being creatures *of* God. If, like Isaiah, we are going to answer the call—*Here I am, send me!*—then that healthy humility of knowing what we don't know is crucial, whether we are speaking to those who question the existence of God altogether or to other people of faith who think differently about God than we do. Nobody likes a know-it-all, but everyone really dislikes a know-it-all who claims superior or exclusive knowledge of an infinite, unfathomable mystery.

In our know-everything, do-everything culture, it sounds radical to admit that we *don't* fully understand something—and that we can't figure it out by watching a how-to video on YouTube. How is God three but only one, separate but not divided, different but eternally united? If we're honest, we have to say we don't know. But our job isn't to know, to unravel the mystery that is the Creator of the universe; our job is to worship, to appreciate, to thank, honor, and praise the One who is beyond our understanding.

I was driving down 36 yesterday on my way to go kayaking, and it was one of those mornings where I just couldn't get over how beautiful it is where we live. Given a hundred years I couldn't start from scratch and imagine something as good as what God created—and it's good for me to remember that from time to time—especially when I get to feeling like I should be able to do all things. I have never seen a vision of the Lord in the temple like Isaiah did, but I have seen the view heading south through the Cove. We get these glimpses of the glory of the Lord that fills the whole wide earth, not so that we can place one more piece in the puzzle to wrap our minds around God, but so that we can see more and more clearly that the God who so loves this world wraps his presence around us. Our next hymn is basically a list of names for God, but no list we make could ever be exhaustive. When we run out of words, when we have nothing left to say but *holy, holy, holy*, that is God.