

Scripture Readings and Sermon

May 23, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Isaiah 6:1-8 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The setting of Isaiah's calling is one of political intrigue. Conflict in the Middle East is not a new phenomenon. After King Uzziah died, King Ahaz of Judah soon challenged by the kings of Israel (the northern tribes) and Syria. Syria and Israel were fighting the growing power of Assyria (Iraq) and needed the southern tribe of Judah as an ally in the war. Ahaz refused to join and after their attempt to replace him, Ahaz joined Assyria. Twelve years later, 722 B.C., the ten tribes that made up the nation of Israel were taken into captivity. There are no more records in history as to the fate of those tribes later to be called as the "ten lost tribes of Israel". It is against this back drop of human political intrigue that Isaiah has a vision of the heavenly court. While humanity is in conflict and divided, Isaiah witnesses all of heaven praising God. The contrast causes Isaiah to proclaim, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips". And yet, when God calls for someone to bring the divine word into an unclean world, Isaiah responds with "Here I am" which in Hebrew literally means, "I am here, see me!"

Isaiah 6:8 And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Have you ever volunteered for something before "reading the fine print"?

Were you prepared for all that the job would demand?

Reading past this scripture, do you think Isaiah was prepared?

Do you think the disciples knew what they were doing when they first got out of the boat?

When God calls, will you be ready even knowing what might happen?

Commentary on John 3:1-12 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After attending the wedding in Cana, Jesus makes his first trip to Jerusalem for the Passover. Upon entering the Temple, Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers and condemns the commercialization of Passover. It is after this, that Nicodemus comes to Jesus "by night". Was Nicodemus afraid to be seen with Jesus after the episode at the Temple? The Gospel of John is very symbolic and the reference to "night" may indicate Nicodemus' ignorance. Nicodemus is seeking the "light" at night. This is John's first reference to the "kingdom of God". In this context, the "kingdom" is the spiritual presence of God. Jesus clarifies being "born from above" or "born again" (both are valid translations of the Greek) as being born of "water and Spirit". In the context of the next verse, water can refer to the flesh as in a physical birth or symbolically a new birth through repentance the context of baptism (see John the Baptist's discussion after this section). The interpretation of repentance links the phrase "water and Spirit" to "repent and believe" which other gospels link to the kingdom of God. Belief or faith which comes from the Spirit, then bridges this discussion with the story of the serpent and the wilderness and the statement "that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life". Linking belief with the Spirit is why so many fail to recognize Jesus in the Gospel of John. Belief is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

John 3:8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

When has your perspective on things radically changed? Wedding? Funeral? College?

Do you even recognize person you used to be?

Have you experienced this at a reunion where people treat you as you used to be?

Could this be what it means to be "born of the Spirit"?

How has the experience of God changed your life?

Commentary on Romans 8:12-17 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

For Paul, the flesh does not represent the created nature which God declared good but rather the self centered survival instincts that seek immediate gratification of the individual over the longer term needs of the community. Paul uses the term flesh to refer to all actions which distort the original goodness. The Spirit reveals a better way to act based not on self gratification but on sacrificial love. Like a parent leading a child, the Spirit reveals the destructive nature of our habits and leads us into positive habits and relationships. The term Abba which means "Daddy" is an intimate reference by a child towards their father and is rarely used in religious Jewish writings because of presumption of familiarity. For Paul, however, this familiarity is possible because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which changes our relationship to God from legal covenant to a familial relationship with God as Father.

Romans 8:14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Do you have good memories of your childhood?

What should a child expect from their parents? Protection? Love? Security?

What does it mean to be part of a family? Chores? Expectations?

What does it mean to say we are children of God?

What do we expect from our Father?

What is expected from us?

Sermon "Trinity" ([Sermon Video](#))

When asked to explain the Trinity, an early church leader told this story.

There was a man walking along a beach when he came upon a young boy. The boy had dug a hole in the sand and was filling the hole with water from the sea with a bucket. The man asked the boy what he was doing to which the boy replied that he was going to put the whole ocean into the hole he dug. The man said, "That is impossible! There is no way your hole could hold all of that water." The boy responded, "Why not? You are trying to understand the Trinity!"

It is impossible, this side of the veil, for us to comprehend the fullness of God. The best we can do is talk about aspects of God revealed in nature, in scripture, and by experience. When we experience the wonder of God through general revelation in the created world, we speak about the Father and Creator of all things. This is the same Father who saved Noah, called Abraham, and delivered the people from Egypt. Because God, the Father, made all things, we seek the will of the Father so that we can live into our own created fullness. Listening to the Father's will is like sitting down with the designer and manufacturer. It is only when by seeking the Father's will that we can live up to the potential we created to be. Since all things were created good, we also know that when we follow the Father's will that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.

The Old Testament not only witnesses to the Father but promises that God will lead the people as a shepherd leads a flock. God will deliver us and restore us not just through spokespersons but in person. That 'person' of God we call Jesus Christ, the Son. The Son is God incarnate, experienced in the flesh in history. The Son is not the totality of God for none of creation can fully contain God but is that part of God through which all things were made. Thus, the Son speaks to the Father and is accompanied by the Spirit but is never truly apart from the fullness of God. One description of this mystery is like a hand that enters a fish bowl. While the hand is fully part of the total person, the fish can only experience the hand because it is like them in the water. Don't push this or any analogy too far because God is after all a mystery (the ocean as perceived by a hole in the sand). Through Jesus, however, we have been given a special revelation by God of this mystery which after two thousand years we are still learning from. The Son is the Father just as the Father is the Spirit but all experienced in different ways.

When Isaiah experienced his vision of God, he witnessed the awesome wonder of the Father and realized how far short humanity had fallen from who we were created to be. In the midst of his despair, however, the presence of God touched his mouth, as Jesus touched the world, and blotted out his sin and guilt. It was only then that Isaiah could perceive the voice of God. Jesus tells Nehemiah that this is what happens when we are born from above. Our eyes and our ears are opened to the reality of the Kingdom of God. This happens after we repent and are washed of our sins. Then the Spirit enters the cleansed temple of our heart and we experience the presence of God. The Spirit goes beyond the general revelation of the Father and the special revelation of the Son. The Spirit is the direct revelation of God speaking to our soul, our mind, and our heart. The Spirit intercedes for our deepest needs and guides us into a greater understanding of God and God's will for our lives. The Son moves from the stories in scripture to a living presence in our hearts by the presence of the Spirit. We are no longer simply created by the Father but are children of the Father as part of the family with Jesus. The Spirit is the realization of our adoption.

There has ever only been one God but because of our human limitations we find it easier to talk about the aspects of God we encounter rather than the mystery of God beyond our comprehension. The more we experience the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the more we live into that mystery where it soon becomes hard to distinguish between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And that is the point for all the names we proclaim all testify to the one will of God.