

Rev. Danny Mackey
Holy Trinity
June 12, 2022
John 3:1–17; Isaiah 6:1–7; Rm 11:33–36
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever.

The Church Year has two halves, and Trinity Sunday is where it switches gears. The first is the Life of Christ half where we hear about Jesus' earthly life—from His conception and then birth at Christmas, through His Passion, and then His Resurrection on Easter and finally the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It's the half where we celebrate all the festivals. The second half is the Life of the Church, those Sundays after Trinity Sunday. Throughout these months we hear of Christ's miracles and teachings and how God works in the Church's Life, so that we might believe and be saved.

So Trinity Sunday kicks off this second half of the Church Year with the most important and basic thing: the One, True God and our relationship to Him.

In all three of our lessons, we see and learn that our God is Triune—that is, we have one God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah's vision, the angels sing, "Holy, holy, holy," one holy for each person of the Trinity. In the Epistle, St. Paul writes that "from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." Three prepositions, one for each person of the Trinity. This God is the source, means, and goal of everything. And then the Gospel, where we're told the Father Almighty sends Christ Jesus, the Son, to win salvation. The Holy Spirit takes people and has them born anew, gives them life, so that by believing in the Son, they might have salvation. This is what God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—this is what God does. And God does it because He is righteous and good. God is holy and full of love and mercy.

If this is God, what's our relationship to Him? How do we, human creatures, interact, relate, and deal with God Almighty? The reading from Isaiah tells us.

Some think Isaiah was a priest, and a highly ranked one at that. Which would explain why he's in the Temple and performing the yearly sacrifice in the Holy of Holies. Only the most important priest and leader is given this duty and privilege. But in the Holy of Holies, Isaiah has a vision. He beholds not just the earthly Temple in Jerusalem, surrounded by the extremely heavy curtains and the richly adorned Ark of the Covenant. Instead of just seeing

the carved cherubim, with wings outstretched on the Ark, Isaiah sees the heavenly courts. He sees God Himself, seated on His throne, the train of God's robe filling the Temple.

What's Isaiah's reaction? *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."* At this moment, Isaiah knows his life is forfeit. By rights, he should be obliterated. Gone. Done away with. Why? Because Isaiah knows he's a sinner. *"A man of unclean lips."*

What does it mean to be a sinner? We think about sins. Don't steal. Don't murder. But being a sinner is more than sinful actions. Sin isn't just something we do—it's a description of who we are. We are sinners. "We are by nature sinful and unclean." That effects everything we do. Here's Isaiah. What's he doing? He's serving God in the Temple. He's being a priest. He's offering the highest and most holy service a person can. If anyone could say he or she was serving God, it'd be Isaiah in this moment. But Isaiah is afraid. Before the LORD, he knows what he is. *"I am a man of unclean lips."* Everything that comes out of them is corrupt. Isaiah knows he's a sinner through and through. Even in the Holy of Holies, everything he does is sinful. Same with us. Even in Church, we are sinners. That's because the Church isn't some museum for saints. It's a hospital for sinners. We are sinful. Sin. Full. Full of sin. That is what we are. It's not something we want to hear. It's something the world denies. Everything we do is tainted and tinged with sin. Everything falls short.

There was a 19th-century philosopher named Soren Kierkegaard. He was nominally Lutheran. One day his wife saw him looking sad. She asked him why. He replied, "I'm not a good person." She said, "Of course, you are! You're a good man, much better than the fellow down the street. He beats his wife. And your better than the fellow up the lane. He cheats people, overcharging them. How can you say you're not a good person?" Kierkegaard replied, "When I look at others, you're right. But when I look at the Scriptures, I can only conclude that I'm a sinner."

Like Isaiah, we are people of unclean lips, living among people of unclean lips. We are sinners, through and through. We might delude ourselves when we compare ourselves to others. But not when we look at the Scriptures. Not when we look at Christ. He was perfect. Just as the Father demands. Just as the Father demands of us. We're not perfect. None of us. Because we are sinful. Full of sin. Period.

This is what Jesus says in our Gospel. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* What are you like? Well, you need to be born anew. You need to be born. Before God, by yourself you’re as good as dead. This is what Scripture says, repeatedly. St. Paul in Ephesians: “You were dead in trespasses.” Dead. Not alive. What we do, our sinful acts don’t impress God. Prophet Isaiah: “All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” You think you’re good? No, you’re not. You’re a mess in your pants. Scripture is blunt about our condition. By nature, there isn’t a good thing about us. We are dirty, rotten scoundrels. We sin. We fall short of the glory of God. To think otherwise is to lie to ourselves. But God won’t be fooled by our lies. Nothing in us earns or deserves His respect, deserves His love. That’s hard. Harsh, even. We don’t like to admit it. I don’t like to say it. But when we compare ourselves to God’s holiness... well, we have to be like Isaiah.

God sees our sin. Our shortcomings and flaws. There’s not enough makeup to conceal the birthmark of sin. And this is where God is wonderful. While God, by all rights, should just destroy us, should just toss us aside into some cosmic wastepaper basket. But He doesn’t. Instead, He’s wonderful. Wonder. Full. Full of wonder. Period.

“For God so loved the world.” God loves the world. God loves us. God loves you.

This is how God loves you. God’s loving you isn’t Him thinking you’re nice. It isn’t Him putting up with you, tolerating your foibles. This is how God loves you: He gives His only Son, gives Jesus Christ over to death, sheds the blood of Christ so that your sinfulness might be covered, cleansed, washed away. Everything about you that is wrong, that falls short—your sinfulness, through and through, is covered by Christ Jesus. Just as you are completely a sinner, Christ Jesus is completely and totally wonderful. He is righteous and good. He is perfectly holy. And He shed His blood on the cross so that you can be declared righteous and good and enter His most holy presence.

It was because of Christ’s death on the cross, the sacrifice that He made, that Isaiah wasn’t struck down. Because of Christ, the angel was able to fly over to the altar and grab the burning coal to purify Isaiah’s lips. Jesus paid the price of Isaiah’s guilt. Jesus’ sacrifice atoned for Isaiah’s sin. After all, it was Jesus Christ that Isaiah saw sitting on the throne of heaven. And that’s how wonderful God is. He wants Isaiah with Him. So He makes sure Isaiah is forgiven. And so we learn what God is like. Who God is. He is the God who forgives sinners. He forgives us. He forgives you.

How do we get this forgiveness? Jesus says, *"You must be born again."* This isn't something we can do by ourselves. None of us chose to be born of our parents. Same here. God must do this. And God did this when He took each one of us and brought us to His font. With water and His Word, He washed us clean in Holy Baptism. There we received His life-giving Spirit. The Holy Spirit. We were joined to the Son's death and resurrection. And the heavenly Father declared of us the same thing He said at Jesus' Baptism: "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

We are completely and totally holy. We are saints. Washed at the font and fed from the altar—just as the seraph brought to Isaiah's lips a gift of life from the altar. We get something better than a burning coal. Rather, we get Christ's own body and blood. Given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. For us Christians to eat and to drink. And we partake and are healed. As Prophet Isaiah also writes, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." By ourselves, on our own, apart from Christ we are filthy, bloody rags. But with Christ, joined to Christ, we are white as snow, like clean, fresh wool.

When God sees us, He sees us completely righteous and holy. All for the sake of Christ. Looking at us, the Father sees His Son. And when God looks at the world, He sees all the people He gave His Son for. He paid for them, and He offers them His holiness. He can withhold His anger and punishment from the world because of Christ. And He does so... at least, for a while longer. More than that: He gives dignity to all people. While we might see the sin in us and others, the Father beholds His love in Christ for us... and for them. He continues to send His Holy Spirit to proclaim His love so that they might also be born again. He wants to also call them His children, His sons and daughters.

Beloved of the Lord, marvel in the LORD, the God in whom we worship. He is one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He beholds us as sinners, but because of His love for us, He declares us saints in Christ Jesus, by the working of the Spirit. And our God desires nothing more than to be with us for all eternity, in His presence, so He fulfills all that's necessary for that to happen. That's who God is. And that is how we relate to Him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ + Jesus.