

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Isaiah 6:1-8

SERMON TITLE: Confession to Mission

Wow! What an amazing vision of God Isaiah is given. He sees God as a ruler sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. In fact, God is so lofty in Isaiah's vision that the Temple—the so-called dwelling place of God—is filled not with God's presence, but with the hem of God's robe. Isaiah sees these heavenly beings called seraphs flying about the throne, covering their nakedness with four of their six wings, and all the while worshiping God as the holy one whose glory fills the whole earth. And as these heavenly beings call back and forth to one another in praise of God's awesome holiness, the sound of their voices shakes the very foundations of the Temple, and the house fills with smoke.

And all I can say is, WOW! Do you know what I'm thinking? If only God would grant me a vision like this! I would do anything for God. If you think I'm committed now—if God would only give me a vision like Isaiah's vision—I'd be really committed! I would speak any word God wanted me to speak to anyone at any time no matter what the cost. I wouldn't be afraid anymore of what people think of me. No more timidity. No more cowardice. I'd find the courage to live differently. In other words, I would not only speak God's word with boldness; I would embody God's word in every fiber of my being in every moment of my existence. I would say with Isaiah, "Here I am Lord; send me!" and actually mean it! So come on God, blow me away with a vision like Isaiah's vision.

But wait a minute! I've seen this vision. Each time I encounter this story, I see what Isaiah saw—or at least, Monte Marshall's version of it. I can picture the whole thing in my mind's eye. And in those moments, the vision God gave to Isaiah becomes the vision God gives to me—and to you. In fact, each and every time I encounter this story, I am Isaiah.

So I've already seen what Isaiah saw—and on top of this—I've seen what God has done in Jesus Christ—I even fancy myself a follower of Jesus—then why am I still so afraid—so timid—so cowardly? Why won't I do anything for God? Why don't I speak God's word with more boldness? Why don't I live differently so as to embody God's word in every fiber of my being in every moment of my existence?

Well, it occurs to me that I'm Isaiah in another sense: *Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips.* If all of my thoughts and my words and my deeds could somehow be projected on these screens before you this morning, I would run from this place in utter shame.

And it wouldn't be because I doubt God's capacity to love me—after all, this holy God has allowed me to see visions—so like Isaiah—I can say, *my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.* And even more, this holy God has sent Jesus Christ into my life.

No, I would run from this place in utter shame because of my own reluctance to acknowledge who I really am before you and before God. I would run from this place because I have such a hard time forgiving myself for all the ways I've fallen short of the glory of God.

But this shame—this sense of unworthiness (in my eyes, not in God's eyes)—has to be overcome if I'm to completely give myself to God. Maybe a burning coal—metaphorically speaking—is required, to touch my mouth—as painful as that is—to remove the guilt I feel and to blot out the sin that still makes me so ashamed and that keeps me from serving God more fully.

But its not just about me, it's about all of us. Isaiah said, *I am a man of unclean lips , and I live among a people of unclean lips.* Isaiah knew that the power and prosperity enjoyed by the kingdom of Judah under the reign of King Uzziah would not last. And he knew that when the crisis came, the religious shallowness of God's people would be revealed, along with patterns

of social injustice and corruption that God's people had refused to address. And Isaiah knew that the word he received from God about these matters would not be well received by the people.

And we can understand that. It's difficult to acknowledge our personal sins, but even harder, I think to acknowledge our corporate sin. I'll never forget a particular Council on Ministries at Asbury UMC in Corpus Christ where I once served. I was assigned the devotional to begin the meeting. Well, I began by having everyone read the prayer of confession that is part of the United Methodist communion service. "Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, etc. At the conclusion of the prayer, I asked a simple question: Where do we see sin present in Asbury's life? I waited for a response. Dead silence. The discomfort around the table was obvious. Sin at Asbury? What a new thought! We were "Absolutely Asbury!" We weren't used to thinking of ourselves as a people of unclean lips. We read the words of the prayer on the page, but we had no idea of what the words meant in our life together. In that moment, I think we needed an Isaiah—someone unafraid to speak and to live the word of God amongst a people of unclean lips.

So the call is still before us. In Isaiah's vision—that is now our vision—he overheard God's question to the heavenly council: *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*

Well, haven't we overheard the question? Haven't we seen this awesome vision of God? Hasn't a burning coal touched our lips and blotted out our sin? Don't we care about the people with whom we have so much in common? If so, then why not respond: *Here am I, send me!*