

Our culture is often concerned with doing, rather than being. As far as we're concerned, what you do is usually more important than who you are.

When you meet someone, what is one of the first questions you ask? "What do you do for a living? What's your job? What's your role?" And then, if we talk to them a while longer, we might ask, "What are your hobbies? What do you do for fun?" So often, what people do is much more important to us than who they are.

During the church year, we usually focus in on what God does. God created the universe. Jesus healed and preached, he died and rose. The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. But today, on Trinity Sunday, our focus is just the opposite. Our focus today is not on what God does. Instead, it is on who God is.

Today, in looking at who God is, I want to go back in time 2,600 years. I want to go back and focus on our OT lesson from the 6th chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. This portion of Isaiah is hands down, absolutely, the most incredible vision of God anywhere in the OT, and maybe in the whole Bible. It gives Revelation a good run for it's money. Isaiah 6 is a vision that just blows you away.

Isaiah begins, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." To understand that line, we have to know a little about King Uzziah. King Uzziah ascended to the throne at the age of 16. He then reigned until he was 68. For one man to be on the throne for 52 years was almost unheard of in that time period. Given the average lifespan in those days, there were people in Israel who were born, who lived, and who died knowing no other king but Uzziah. It's like England today. Queen Elizabeth II has been on the throne for 63 years. In my lifetime, there has been no other British Monarch.

In Israel, Uzziah's death after a 52 year reign must have left an incredible void, an incredible gap. The king in those days was much more important in people's everyday lives than Queen Elizabeth is today, even in England. The death of King Uzziah meant for his people that their sense of stability would be out the window.

And so, when Isaiah tells us, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne," there is a strong message. Uzziah may have been dead. There may be a vacuum on his earthly throne. But the real throne is still occupied by the Lord. Earthly kingdoms and governments may change and fall. But the Lord is still in charge. The Lord still sits on his throne.

And, Isaiah describes that throne. He tells us, the Lord's throne is high and lofty. Other kings may sit on a throne on top of a few steps. But the Lord's throne is far higher. In other words, it is above earthly limits. Earthly thrones are temporary and finite. But the Lord's throne touches eternity and infinity.

Next, Isaiah tells us, "the hem of God's robe filled the temple." In Biblical times, the length of your garment was a status symbol. Rich and powerful people could afford long robes. Also, rich and powerful people didn't have to do manual labor, where a long robe would get in

your way. In Biblical times, the longer your robe, the more powerful you are. We have some holdovers of this symbolism today. Think again of Queen Elizabeth. If you've seen pictures of her coronation, she is wearing this enormously long robe that is carried behind her by several people. Or think of the British royal weddings; the dresses Princess Di or Princess Catherine wore with their enormous trains. Those robes trailed 10 or 20 feet behind their wearers. But in Isaiah's vision, God's robe is so large that his train fills the entire temple. The hem of his garment takes up the all the space there is. In other words, God's power is far and above any earthly power.

And then, as if things aren't overwhelming enough, Isaiah says, "Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings." Seraphim, along with cherubim, were angels who had the special job of being in God's presence, offering ceaseless praise. Seraphim are traditionally pictured as having six wings. They only needed two to fly with. With another two they covered their faces, and with the other two they covered their feet, which is a Biblical euphemism for their private parts. They're covering their bodies, shielding God from their creatureliness. And they're covering their faces, shielding themselves from God's overwhelming glory.

Don't miss what Isaiah is telling us here. God's glory and holiness and splendor are so overwhelming that even the angels who were created with the express purpose of being in his presence are created in such a way that they can shield themselves from the immensity of his glory.

The seraphs' job description is simple. They are in God's presence to offer ceaseless praise to his holiness. To be holy is to be so different, so above the ordinary, so glorious, so completely awesome and wonderful that nothing else can even begin compare. But the seraphs don't just say that God is Holy. They say, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts."

Holy, holy, holy. We say these words every week. Thus we can miss their impact. In Hebrew, repeating a word is a way of emphasizing that word. We sometimes do the same type of thing in English. Usually they would repeat the word twice for emphasis. On very, very rare occasions they would repeat the word three times for extra emphasis. Notice I said, "Very, very." Maybe I should have said, "Very, very, very."

To say that God is Holy, Holy, Holy, is absolute superlative in Hebrew. No other characteristic of God in scripture is ever repeated three times. The Bible says, "God is love," but it never says God is love, love, love. It never says God is just, just, just. It never says God is merciful, merciful, merciful. What it does say, and therefore what it does stress about God's nature, is that God is Holy, Holy, Holy.

At the very center of God's being is his holiness. Holiness is the center, holiness is THE defining characteristic of God's being. That's the unparalleled message of the 6th chapter of Isaiah.

What would you do if you were privileged to have such a powerful and overwhelming vision of God's glory? I tell you what I'd probably do. I'd probably faint. Or I'd

probably lose control of my bodily functions. That's kind of gross, but what else could you do? Bottom line: this vision is overpowering. Isaiah's spirit and his senses have to be completely overwhelmed.

He says as much. He says, "Woe is me! I am lost." In other words, 'I'm dead meat. I've had it.' Why? Because, "My eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

After all, even the glorious seraphs have those extra wings to protect themselves from looking upon God. But Isaiah comes before God's holiness unprotected. There's nothing about Isaiah that makes him worthy to stand in God's presence. His terminology to describe that is being a man of unclean lips. He's unworthy. He's sinful and fallible. He doesn't deserve to be there. There's no way that he should be allowed to stand in God's utterly holy presence.

Yet, a remarkable thing happens. God does for Isaiah what Isaiah cannot do for himself. He sends one of the seraphim over to purify Isaiah. The seraph touches his mouth with one of the coals from the incense brazier. And by doing so, Isaiah is ritually cleansed. His sin is wiped out. And after that, God commissions him to go out with a message, as a prophet of the Holy One of Israel.

The sixth chapter of Isaiah puts us face to face with something we often ignore or overlook. God is holy. God is very different from us. God is far above us in every way that we can possibly conceive. God is supremely other. God is Holy, Holy, Holy.

At times in the past, Christians have been in danger of emphasizing God's differentness too much. Christians in the past have thought of God as distant and remote. In times past, Christians have missed out on how God is made visible and knowable in the person of Jesus Christ. In times past Christians have forgotten that God is wonderfully and intimately present with us and within us in the person of the Holy Spirit. And we mustn't make that same mistake. God is with us and within us in wonderfully near and intimate ways.

But perhaps the danger for Christians today is from the other direction. We mustn't forget the other side of the paradox. We are a very casual culture. There's nothing wrong with that. But we have to be careful not to be spiritually casual and forget who it is we're worshiping.

God is Holy, Holy, Holy. That's the very essence of his being. When we walk through those doors on Sunday morning, the God we come here to worship is a Holy God. We forget God's holiness at our own spiritual peril. It is dangerous to ignore his majesty and splendor. It is inadvisable to take his holiness for granted.

What would your worship be like if you had the same kind of vision Isaiah had? What if the veil were lifted, and you caught a glimpse the eternal worship of God in the heavenly throne room? What if you saw the Lord, high and lifted up, surrounded by angels, with the floor shaking beneath your feet?

Would your worship ever be the same again? Would you ever take your worship of the living God for granted again? Would you ever willingly miss an opportunity to gather with his people and sing his praises?

I pray that we all may be ever mindful of the holy nature of our God. God has done many wonderful things for which we offer thanks and praise. But the most important thing we do in worship is not to thank God for what he has done. The most important thing is to praise God for WHO HE IS.

The most important thing is to bow in worship and adoration. The most important thing is to proclaim with the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts."