



Holy Trinity Sunday-May 30, 2021
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Isaiah 6:1-8 and John 3:1-17

"Then I Heard"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

I would admit that my hearing isn't improving with my age. Sometimes I blame my inability to hear on people not speaking clearly or loud enough. Sometimes I blame it on there being too much background noise so that I don't hear everything that is said. Sometimes I am thinking about something else, so I blame that distraction on plugging my ears. I have been conducting experiments lately with my grandchildren by asking them a question while they are doing something on their electronic devices or watching a show on tv. I have quite a bit of evidence that would support that these types of distractions completely deafen people to other voices. It seems that if you have something really important to say, all distractions need to be shut off and then you may have to say, "Now look at me so you will hear what I have to say" in order to be heard.

In our first lesson for today, Isaiah was distracted by many things in his vision of the Lord. I have had dreams where I am completely exhausted when I wake up as I remember the many and peculiar details of my dreams. Isaiah had such a vision when he saw the Lord in his vision. The only part of the Lord that we are told Isaiah saw of the Lord was the hem of his robe and it was so large that it filled the temple. Isaiah did not want to see the face of the Lord because he knew that if he did, he would die. Isaiah then saw the angel-like six winged heavenly beings called seraphs that were hovering over the throne of the Lord. These seraphs even feared seeing the face of the Lord, so they used one set of wings to cover their eyes. In this vision, Isaiah heard one seraph tell another seraph that the Lord was not just once Holy or even twice Holy, but was Holy, Holy, Holy. The seraphs proclaimed to Isaiah that he was in the presence of a Holy and powerful God that should be feared. This fear increased as the foundations of the temple shook and then he saw the temple fill with smoke.

When Isaiah witnessed the power and holiness of the Lord in his vision, he didn't respond with enthusiasm. He responded in fear. Isaiah said, "Woe is me." Isaiah confessed that he was unclean and lived among unclean people. Isaiah had nothing to offer the Lord, except the confession that he was a sinner. Isaiah's confession only left him in fear of the Lord.

The presence of the Holy Lord had Isaiah fearing death. This was not the end of Isaiah's vision, however. The Lord who created heaven and earth was about to create new life in Isaiah. This new life was not going to be delivered by seeing another vision that would cause fear, but by opening Isaiah's ears so that he could hear what God the Father had to say to him. Isaiah's vision continued by one of these seraph's taking a hot coal from the altar with a tong and touching his unclean lips. It was only after the seraph touched Isaiah's mouth and said, "Your guilt is gone, and your sin is blotted out" that Isaiah was able to hear the Lord's voice.

When the Lord wants you to hear him, he doesn't say like a parent says to a child, "Now look at me so that you can hear me." Looking at the Lord would only increase your fear of him. Instead, the Lord forgives your sin so that your ears are open to hear the love the Lord has for you.

Nicodemus in the gospel for today did not have the kind of fear of the Lord that Isaiah experienced. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. A good person. A person who did his best at doing the right things as often as he could. But it was his pride in his goodness that prevented him from hearing what Jesus was saying to him. Instead of Nicodemus confessing that he was a sinner, Nicodemus put himself on the same level as Jesus. Nicodemus was a teacher of the law, so he addressed Jesus also as a teacher. Nicodemus apparently had heard about signs that he had performed such as turning the water into wine at the wedding at Cana which happened just before this story in John. Nicodemus said that Jesus was a teacher come from God; for no one can do signs apart from the presence of God. Nicodemus was correct that Jesus came from God, but he didn't believe Jesus was God.

*Jesus then proceeds to lower Nicodemus from teacher status to student as he schools him about the kingdom of God and the Trinity. Nicodemus had no idea what it means to be born of water and the Spirit. When Jesus speaks of being born again or born from above, Nicodemus confesses that he had never heard of such a thing by saying "How can this be?" When Jesus compares the work of the Holy Spirit to the random, invisible, uncontrollable power of the wind, Nicodemus was as unable to hear what he was saying as trying to get a child to hear you while they were playing Minecraft. Nicodemus was taught and believed you could ascend to heaven through good works. Jesus said that no one has ever ascended into heaven, except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. Then Jesus tells Nicodemus that **no one** can enter the kingdom of heaven without being born of water and the spirit and Nicodemus has no idea what this means. Nicodemus was starting to hear something that he was never able to hear before.*

Nicodemus didn't have a good teacher to teacher conversation the night he went to visit with Jesus. Instead, Jesus lowered Nicodemus to nothing more than a sinner who could only enter the kingdom of heaven by faith. A sinner who was born again, not by his or her choosing, but born again by water and the Spirit. Reborn through the waters of baptism.

The story today about Nicodemus ends with the familiar words of John 3:16. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. From this story of Nicodemus and how Jesus seemed to knock him down it would be tempting for us to dismiss Nicodemus as an unbeliever and someone who never had his ears opened by the Spirit. But God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, and this is not the last we hear about Nicodemus. Later in the gospel of John we learn that it was Nicodemus who went with Joseph of Arimetha to embalm the body of Jesus after his crucifixion. Nicodemus witnessed more than water turned to wine. Nicodemus witnessed how God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Nicodemus witnessed how God so loved him.

Each week we begin our worship services much like Isaiah's vision. We come into the presence of God and confess that we are sinners. It is not our confession that opens our ears, but it is God's words of absolution which removes our guilt and sin. We do this so that we can clear our minds of any distractions that would prevent us from hearing the good news of what the Holy Trinity will do for you.

We give thanks today on this Holy Trinity Sunday for the Holy Spirit who has opened your ears to hear again the love God the Father has for you by sending his Son who has removed your guilt and sin and given you eternal life. Amen

