

Isaiah and Us; Meeting God in Worship

Trinity Sunday - May 2018

Introduction

Message

Meeting God in Worship

Today is Trinity Sunday in a month where I am following the theme of being spiritual in the Holy Spirit. So I have been praying about what to bring this morning. Where I got to involved three points:

- 1) The spiritual vision I work to for Trinity Church
- 2) How that vision is illustrated in today's reading from Isaiah - *which is yet to come*.
- 3) What spiritual vision is and is not about.

Part 1. The spiritual vision I work to for Trinity Church.

2001 Notice

Job needs specific to Trinity Church

- Develop a spiritual vision for Trinity Church
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As I have recounted before, in June 2001 a job description appeared on my computer screen describing what people in Eindhoven wanted in their next pastor. The first 'Job need specific to Trinity Church' was "Develop a spiritual vision for Trinity Church." That was the first line and when I read I felt arrested in my seat.

Here was a church that actually wanted help to develop in 'spiritual vision' and had that at the very top of their wish list. In my experience that was rare so I was drawn deeper into the list of job needs and personality profile. Eleven months later we were here.

What I had learned by that time about spiritual growth is that it happens one person at a time and is a constant experience of the parable of the sower. Spiritual growth in a church context is about maturing people in discipleship to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is hard work and there is a lot that works against this. So from when I landed here I have been at work to move people forward in Jesus Christ so that the roots go deeper into him. I have used many tools, Alpha, Baptism, seminars, special events, confirmation preparation, every pastoral encounter - and preaching too.

One past experience that focused me on this was what happened in my first church as pastor. Over 7 years the church changed and grew. Within that growth I had clear discipleship relationship with about 12 people who had come to the church and some been converted there. When I moved on all 12 also moved within the next year with most of them going on to significant ministries elsewhere. They took their spiritual gold with them. The church shrunk back to the happy few.

In my spiritual vision a church with people rooted and maturing in Jesus Christ becomes a witness to the reality of God present with his people in the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus is alive because his people live his life and show his Spirit.



Philips
Lichttoren
Witte Dame

Before I even arrived here a warden named Phil Brown was talking about Trinity Church as a lighthouse because Philips used to run a light testing facility on the tower of the Witte Dame in central Eindhoven – remember?



New Witness
Amidst
Old Ruins

So when in 2007 I found myself looking at this lighthouse in France it depicted the vision in my heart for Trinity Church. This is a modern clear light tower standing amidst ruins. They are church ruins. They are the brokenness of the world we live in. They are our personal brokenness.

This is my spiritual icon for what I work to develop here.

I expect some people here are thinking:

“Well that is *interesting* Francis but not where I am at or not why I am part of this community.”

Others might be asking, OK, so how does this happen? And how do we make it happen?

I am going to speak to that with reference to today’s passage from Isaiah.

So how do we deepen people in God as disciples of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Anyone arriving here will soon realize that our first and best energies of Trinity Church are offered in worship. Can you see that? Sunday is when Trinity Church is most Trinity Church and it’s about worship.

The way this connects with my spiritual vision is illustrated by the experience of Isaiah of Jerusalem as we hear it in Isaiah 6.1-8.

As Martin brings this passage could we listen to it as the experience in worship that propelled Isaiah into being the greatest prophet of the Old Testament

Isaiah 6.1-8 (ESV)

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: “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!”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Part 2 How that vision is illustrated in today’s reading from Isaiah.

There is so much here! Isaiah seems to have been a priest. His calling was worship in the temple. One day something happens that changes everything. He meets the living God. As the writer to the Hebrews would later write; (10:31)

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Let's consider this in 3 steps:

A) The Vision of God

Isaiah 6:1
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In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

- In a time of instability and vulnerability for the people of Israel Isaiah ‘saw’ the living God and experienced his majesty, his transcendence and greatness.
- His sense of God’s and his presence was very, very big. The first temple was a tall building rated at 120 cubits or about 60 meters.¹ In Isaiah’s awareness of God’s presence that was the height of the hem (some translations read ‘train’) of his robe. This is The God of Heaven touching down amidst worship on earth.

¹ <http://solomonstemple.com/the-temple/first-temple-height-foundation/>

- Then we read:

Isaiah 6:2-3
²Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

- So while the hem/train of God's robe filled the Temple at 60 meters, Isaiah could see above God on His throne to both see and hear angelic worshippers declaring the holiness of God.

In summary, while worshipping in uncertain times Isaiah encountered the living God and he was big!

B) Engagement with God

In this awareness the Temple is touched and Isaiah is touched:

Isaiah 6:4-5
⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: "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!"

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

This is dramatic. The most solid features of Isaiah's existence are shaken. God rocks his world!

What does this do to Isaiah?

⁵ And I said: "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!"

- This is so special. Isaiah knows himself in the light of God's presence.
 - He knows his essential sinful nature – lost, unclean lips
 - He knows the sinful nature of the people he represents as a priest in worship
 - He knows that what he has seen is deeply challenging.
 - God's light shows it all up.
- The reality of God in worship is convicting and brings to crisis.
 - It is breaking.
 - God is real and we are not what we need to be.
 - God is holy, we are not.

This is what needs to happen in every heart.

This is what Peter went through several times with Jesus.

God does not convict but our awareness of him and ourselves does.

We are not told how long Isaiah stays in this place of revelation and wounding conviction.

This is the 'kick in the guts' or 'slap around the ears' that we humans seem to need if we are to grow spiritually.

If God acted as benign bestower of blessings answering prayers for this or that and giving everyone cause for thanks, what would happen? I suspect most of us would respond as spoilt brats like the 9 lepers Jesus healed that took their healing and ran never to be seen again.

It's an experience of God's reality and our reality that lays us open and bare before God that can happen in worship – if that's what you want worship to be?

This is very much part of my life experience.

So God now has Isaiah's 110% attention. He is aware of God's glory and his own unclean lost state.

Isaiah 6:6-7
 “Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

- What is this? I describe this as ‘hot grace.’
 - Isaiah has confessed his dirty mouth and the grace of God comes to make it clean.
 - How this happens 600 years before the cross I do not know but I do know that conviction precedes grace the same way a sharp sermon wounds the heart before it heals. Isaiah was cut and healed, burnt and assured through meeting God in worship.

C) Call and Sending

It could end there for Isaiah but there is one more verse:

Isaiah 6:8
 “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Isaiah hears God’s call upon him.

He has been convicted. He has been cleansed in grace. He has been assured of this.

Now he senses God’s call upon him to serve as a representative of the LORD.

Isaiah responds as a waiting servant.

Isaiah 6:8
 “Here I am! Send me.”
 הִנְנִי hineni

He uses the Hebrew word **הִנְנִי** /*hineni*. This is a word expressing total availability and readiness to God’s call. It is the response of a servant. It’s what God wanted to hear when he asked Adam: “Where are you?”

This word was used by Abraham when he was called by God to sacrifice Isaac. It was also the response of Moses and the boy Samuel. Now Isaiah responds in worship with *hineni*.

Application

This is what I pray for to be happening in our worship as Paul advised the Corinthians to expect when non-believers came among them in worship.² It’s about people coming under the conviction of the God’s reality and their own inner condition.

In practice I have often seen people journey through this process in a season of their lives. Isaiah got there in one session but for myself and others it appears to happen over a year or so. Some people come to church and week after week find themselves weeping before the Lord over themselves and others. Only safe understanding churches can handle that. Churches that do not understand this think it's a problem but it's actually very good.

² 1 Corinthians 14: ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

Part 3. What spiritual vision is and is not about.

Spiritual vision ??

This has to be short so let's ask: How do you do this?

This mode of spiritual vision does not run on plans, budgets, programs, policy or organisation.

What does seem to help is people pressing into God and talking about that as a matter of life.

It thrives on what Jesus described as 'Spirit' and Truth' or costly authenticity.

It thrives when a community allows for and engages hunger for God and his presence.

It thrives on prayer as a way of life.

It requires the spiritual work of a community and not just a few worship leaders.

I will continue to take every opportunity to lean into this.

I am looking for signs of people meeting God in worship and some Isaiah like process.



When that happens enough times the atmosphere changes and things light up – like a lighthouse!