

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. 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. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 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!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

A recent study by Arizona Christian University and Barna research, in their 2021 American Worldview Inventory notes that 43% of Millennials (the 18-36 age group) "don't know, don't care, or don't believe that God exists". We could spend a fair bit of time talking about the social, moral and psychological implications of these attitudes among Millennials. It is fair to say that there are some very great and negative impacts on our world as a whole as a result of people not believing in God.

I haven't seen any studies that try to describe why these attitudes are so prevalent among Millennials. I know some of the discussions I have had with people about God, and how it is their perceptions of God that make them indifferent to Him, or lead them to believe that He doesn't exist. I'm sure that Pastor Eric can tell you many stories of his encounters with students. Many will start their diatribes with the observation, "I can't believe in a god who would... and you can fill in the blank. Many struggle with God because, in their opinion, He seems indifferent to the needs of our world. This leads to the misguided philosophical argument that "if God is all loving, He can't be all powerful" because he wouldn't let things like famine, flood, hurricanes and COVID bring loss and death to so many. Others argue that they can't believe in a god who is judgmental—a god who would destroy the world in a flood, or who sends people to hell because he thinks they haven't been good enough. Still others can't believe in a god who is just a prude and a kill-joy, not wanting us to enjoy any of the things that He created for our good.

On this Trinity Sunday, we come to confess our faith in the true, the Triune God. We don't believe in the god that so many people in our world do not believe in, either. If you do, then your god is too small. Rather, we believe in a God who is beyond all understanding. We believe in a God who is righteous and holy, yet who loves and forgives us in the Eternal Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. We believe in the True God, who is the Triune God, and whose very nature defies our understanding. With St. Paul, we acknowledge: *"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."* (Romans 11:33-36, ESV)

When I teach my adult information classes, I ask people what they think God is like. I wonder what would happen if we just discussed that thought this morning. I know that, in some ways, we all have a misguided idea of God. Comedian George Carlin once talked about people getting together and creating god in their own image. That is often the way we want to approach God. For some Christians, God is the greatest super hero, sort of like Superman, Thor, Captain America and Wonder Woman rolled into one great hero. Others think of God as the greatest of the angels. Still others think of God as just something more than ourselves. We want to bring God down to our level, to know and understand everything about Him.

But let's see God today the way that Isaiah saw Him. Isaiah tells us: *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.* Maybe that word, "saw" is a bit difficult. When Isaiah says that he "saw" the Lord, he does not describe how this happened. Was it a vision, a dream, or something that happened that day in the temple? He doesn't tell us. He doesn't describe God directly. We do know that no eye can gaze directly on the glory of God. When Moses asked God: *"Please show me your glory"*, the Lord told him: *"I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be*

gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, ***“you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”***” (Exodus 33:18–20, ESV) Yet there are many who experienced what we call “theophanies,” which means “manifestations of God.” These theophanies are God’s way of bringing His vastness to the limited minds of mere humans, helping us to see the God who is a personal, active God, working for the good of His people.

Isaiah does see the presence of God. He talks about the throne and the train of His robe that was so great it filled the temple. He speaks of the marvellous six-winged seraphim who sang around the throne. He can tell us about the shaking of the heavenly temple’s foundation and the smoke that filled the room. But all this is too much for him. It makes him uncomfortable, for he is painfully aware of his sin as he stands in the presence of the Holy One of Israel. He is a sinner, a man whose lips cannot utter the praises that the seraphim sang; a man who, like all people, is filled with the shame and ugliness that is in our words, our thoughts and our actions. Isaiah sees the glory of God—what a wonderful thing that is! But he also knows that he is so far removed from that glory that there was only one thing he deserved: death.

Who among us would feel any different? Standing in the holy presence of God, we too, would see just how sinful we truly are. God is holy. We are filthy with the stains of countless sins. God is faithful. We are fickle. God is everything. His glory fills all creation, and creation itself proclaims the greatness of God. We are nothing. We need to be honest with ourselves, honest enough to recognize our unworthiness.

But now, marvel at the wonderful God we have! It is the Lord of Holiness who works forgiveness and salvation for His people. The angel who brought the coal from the altar to touch Isaiah’s lips declared a wonderful promise to Him: ***“See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*** The imperfect, sinful Isaiah could come into the presence of God, because God Himself had taken away his sin. You and I can have that confidence, too. Paul reminds us that the day is coming when we will see God face to face, because God has done something about our sin. In Jesus Christ, God Himself comes to take away our guilt and to atone for our sinfulness. The Holy One gives Himself in our place on the cross and dies as He suffers the death we deserve. His sacrifice makes us whole and clean, fit to come into His presence, a presence we shall enjoy forever when we join the resurrected, glorious Lord in His eternal kingdom.

Isaiah helps us to see the glory and majesty of God, and the love and mercy of the God who forgives our sins. When I read these words, it reminds me that so many people have a god—or an image of God—that is too small. If you think that God is all about judgment and wrath, then your God is too small. He says of Himself: ***“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”***” (Exodus 34:6–7, ESV) No, God will not excuse sin, but if you think that God cannot forgive your sins, then your God is too small. Jesus assures us in our Gospel lesson today: ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”***” (John 3:16–17, ESV)

If you think of God the way some do—as the great watchmaker, who creates the world and winds it like a watch that He just leaves to run down, then your God is too small. He declares: ***“Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.”***” (Jeremiah 23:23–24, ESV) As Job says: ***“In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.”***” (Job 12:10, ESV) Yes, the God who created heaven and earth continues to be the great God who cares for His creation.

That also means that God cares for you. If you think that your concerns, no matter how trivial, are outside the realm of God’s love for you, your God is too small. Jesus assures us: ***“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”***” (Matthew 10:29–31, ESV) Peter tells us: ***“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”***” (1 Peter 5:6–7, ESV)

If you are overwhelmed by the vastness, the majesty, and the very fact that God is so far beyond us and our understanding, that’s good. If you think you can know and understand everything about God, then I would say your God is too small. Yet this great and glorious God, who made His glory known to Isaiah is the God who has made Himself known to you, too! He makes His glory known to us in the words of Holy Scripture. Best of all, He has made His glory known in Jesus Christ. John assures

us: ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** (John 1:14, ESV)

Today we join with the seraphim and the whole host of heaven to declare: ***“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”*** Even though that glory is too much for us now, we rejoice in the great and glorious God we have: the God and Father who created all things; the God and Saviour who redeemed us by suffering our punishment on the cross, and rising to bring us life with Him; the God and Comforter, who has opened our eyes to see and believe in the wonder of this glorious God of grace and mercy; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, the Eternal Three in One! Amen.