

and political arrogance he has inadvertently perpetuated. And he changes his way of life. And he calls others to do the same.

And so it must be for us.

The year King Uzziah died for us today is the year COVID-19 forced us inward. God has sent us all to our rooms, says the social media meme, in order to think about what we have done:

By now we know that Jim Crow era voting restrictions are alive and well, accelerating throughout our country. By now we know that wealth inequality is rigged into our tax code leaving us in worse shape as a society since the eve of the Great Depression. By now we know that our politics is so corrupted, we cannot even come together for a good hard look at how an insurrection unfolded on live television for hours at our nation's capital.

In the year of COVID-19, the world as we have known it has crumbled all around us. And we, like Isaiah, probably come to this time of worship with a prayer for divine deliverance, expecting God's favor, quite certain God will save us because God loves us. We, like Isaiah, come to this time of worship with a hope that maybe, with expanding widespread vaccination availability and the lifting of mask mandates, we can "get back to normal."

And God responds instead with more crumbling and more shattering and more shaking and more humbling.

And maybe that really is what we need as a congregation, as much as we really don't want it. Maybe it will help us have more

compassion for the crumbling lives of the neighbors around us. Maybe it will help us have more compassion for the shattered lives of those who cannot trust their physical safety on the streets, or in their interactions with police. Maybe it will help us have more compassion for the shaking lives of those who cannot trust their political leaders to look out for their well-being.

And not just compassion, as a benevolent benefactor, with a savior complex toward "those less fortunate," but solidarity! To listen and to learn. And to care. As people who are also shaken and crumbling and shattered.

And maybe *because* our foundation has been shaken, through the worship of the living God on this Trinity Sunday Memorial Day Weekend, we, like Isaiah, might have the courage to say:

Here am I, God. Send me!

Service Charges

Rev. Gusti Linnea Newquist

May 30, 2021

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Based on Isaiah 6:1-8. God Shakes Up a Royal Court Prophet

It is 738 years before the birth of Jesus.

In the holiest of holy places, in the heart of that great, glorious Jerusalem temple, built by that great, glorious and supposedly 'wise' King Solomon, the great and glorious prophet Isaiah actually catches a glimpse of his great and glorious god, and lives to tell the tale ...

An event that is just as unheard of in Isaiah's time as it is in our own!

It is an ecstatic vision of sorts, this train of God's robe cascading from the heavens and into the vast caverns of the Temple sanctuary, these six-winged seraphs breathing fire and brimstone upon the altar of Isaiah's already-burning sacrifices to the god he has pledged himself to serve, this burning coal searing his tainted tongue until it can utter only the truth in its totality.

For those among us who lived through the sixties this vision might sound like a really bad LSD trip. But for the biblical world it simply sounds like the call of God, perhaps brought on by incense or some other mind-altering substance, or the deep chanting of a meditative trance, or perhaps it is simply the exaggerated mythopoetic language of a mystical experience that really has no words to describe it.

No matter what caused this ecstatic vision, the call of God leaves Isaiah shaken to his core.

The truth is, though, Isaiah is already quite shaken even before he enters the temple in this fateful act of worship. King Uzziah has died. Isaiah's benefactor. The king who hired Isaiah as a court prophet in the first place. Uzziah, the one who was holding it all together for all of Jerusalem before his untimely – at least for Isaiah – death.

As a prophet employed by the royal court, Isaiah has become accustomed to a really good quality of life. But now that Uzziah is gone the wealth on which he has depended is crumbling. As a prophet employed by the royal court, Isaiah has become accustomed to a dignified social status with religious diplomats from other nations. But now that Uzziah is gone those political alliances are crumbling. As a prophet employed by the royal court, Isaiah has become accustomed to a certain freedom of mind and movement that comes from being surrounded by the armed walls of a fortress. But now that Uzziah is gone the military might of eighth century Jerusalem is crumbling.

Even so, Isaiah's faith in God has been unwavering.

God will surely rescue us, Isaiah believes deep in his soul, because God delivered us from bondage in Egypt. And brought us to this land. And established the Kingdom of David. And became permanently lodged in the sanctuary of this magnificent Temple. Surely God will not allow this Temple or this kingdom or this land or this people to

continue to crumble, Isaiah insists.

But crumble, they have, leaving Isaiah already quite shaken even before he enters the temple in our Lesson for today, pleading with God for a vision of what to do to stop the shaking. And instead of divine deliverance rescuing this royal court prophet, even more shaking of his foundations comes instead.

It is a divine shaking this time. Teaching Isaiah that he has been getting it all wrong, all along.

All of that wealth poured into that temple to elevate Isaiah's quality of life? Gained by exploiting the inequality between the landed gentry and the tenant-farmers who do most of the work. All of that prestige among the rulers of the world to elevate Isaiah's social status? Gained by preaching **to the people** what they have wanted to hear about God's Providence instead of what they have not wanted to hear about God's Justice. All of that military might to elevate Isaiah's freedom? Gained by unholy alliances with the very nations that will turn against them just decades down the line.

To be fair, Isaiah has likely been completely unaware of the depth of injustice he has been perpetuating as a royal court prophet. In the same way you and I have been completely unaware of the privilege our whiteness literally buys us as we navigate this life four hundred years into race-based hierarchy on this stolen land. In the same way you and I have been completely unaware of the Black Wall Street Massacre in Tulsa one century ago, for example.

To be fair, Isaiah has likely spent his entire

career seeking to be faithful to the god who called him to prophetic ministry in the first place ... and thinking he has done so!

But in his previous calling, when King Uzziah was still alive, and the Temple was in great shape, and his social standing was so stellar, Isaiah's only perspective on the calling of God was through the eyes of the people around him, who shared the blessing of his status and his wealth and his military protection.

In his previous calling, when King Uzziah was still alive, and the Temple was in great shape, and his social standing was so stellar, Isaiah did not have to see the reality of the lives of the people beyond his cloistered protected shell.

He did not even know he lived in a cloistered protected shell! But now he does. Because the vision of God has shaken him to his core

We know Isaiah now, of course, as the great biblical prophet who joined his people in exile, who comforted them in oppression, who proclaimed the healing of the nations and a peaceable kingdom where a wolf and a lamb would find a way to live together. We know Isaiah now, of course, as the one who prophesied a Savior.

But Isaiah does not start out as the great prophet we know today. Isaiah starts out caught up in his own glory and his own survival and his own career and his own security. And it is only when that glory and survival and career and security are shaken to their core that he truly comes to know the heart of God. And he truly comes to see the economic injustice and spiritual pride