

The Holy Trinity
June (10 &) 11, 2006
Sermon by Rev Timothy A Leitzke

I believe in the centrality and importance of worship, in doing liturgy in a certain way. We heard just last week in the Faith Statements of our Confirmands their unbidden gratitude for their parents' simple act of bringing them to worship every week, so I know it's powerful. The service of Holy Communion is an icon, an image of God in which we all take part. It is beautiful and glorious. Liturgy teaches us about who we are and reveals the invisible, unknowable God to us. For example, when we open on our knees with Confession we physically acknowledge that we have failed, and that we cannot come to God but need God to come to us; and when we are forgiven we are able to stand before God and sing praises that God indeed comes to us. This being the festival of The Holy Trinity it's a good time to mention when we say the name of the triune God in liturgy. We speak it before the Confession, to remind us of why we are here, and we speak it in the Benediction, the final blessing before we are sent out in mission.

I have to confess, I've always wanted to play with the sending. I've always wanted to rewrite the dismissal from, "Go in peace..." to "You don't have to go home but you can't stay here." It really would fit in the Sending. The sending hymn is essentially ornamental. The desired effect is, "The Lord's Supper is eaten, Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you. Now get out. You don't have to go home but you can't stay here." The name of God is spoken

in the Benediction and we are immediately sent. The revelation is complete and now we must go.

We do that because it reflects how God works with us. Consider the First Reading (Isaiah 6:1-8). Some consider this episode the “call of Isaiah” but he was already a prophet at this point. He doesn’t set the scene; he starts talking and is immediately in God’s throne room, privy to the divine wardrobe and the lyrics of the song of the fiery, snakelike seraphim. His description of what he sees is confounding. It’s hard to tell what he means. It’s probably because it was beyond what words could describe. Barely has the vision begun but a seraph purifies Isaiah’s lips and God commissions him to a specific job. The angels sing, God reveals a few secrets and then tells Isaiah, “You don’t have to go home but you can’t stay here.”

The revelation to Isaiah is his mission. God sends Isaiah to tell what he has seen and heard. It is easy to say that, and say that we should do likewise, but to grasp what it means for Isaiah we have to understand his world. Isaiah lived in the 8th Century BCE in the small Kingdom of Judah, the southern quarter of David’s kingdom. The King, Uzziah, had died, and his grandson would soon reign as King Ahaz. Everyone in Palestine was on edge, because Assyria—a mighty empire to the northeast—had defeated Egypt and was expanding into Palestine. Two of Israel’s closest neighbors, Israel and Aram, wanted Judah to join them in an anti-Assyrian alliance. When King Ahaz of Judah wisely refused Israel and Aram attacked Judah, hoping to put a new king in Ahaz’ place. God commissions Isaiah

to walk right into this mess as it is unfolding. God's message was, "Trust me. Aram and Israel are weak—you can outlast them. Their time is up. Don't be scared. Don't ally yourselves with Egypt or Assyria. Just play it cool. Trust me."

Friends of Christ, imagine being King Ahaz of Judah, knowing you're outnumbered, facing terrible destruction, your world about to be chewed up by war and your own people demanding you do something. Now imagine being Isaiah. You have to go up to this guy and tell him to play it cool and trust God. That's the gospel Isaiah carries. He's seen the Lord. He has heard the angels sing, and their song is assurance to Judah: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of the Heavenly Hosts." A host in this case is not someone holding a dinner party, or the piece of bread you receive at Communion, but an army. Isaiah's revelation is that God's got a few trillion warrior angels just hanging around the palace. Israel and Aram have nothing on him. God has promised to be faithful and will be faithful. God loves Judah and the people of Judah. Yes, the situation is hopeless, so trust God. Alas, Ahaz trusts himself, and asks Assyria to help.

The story is our own, though in our version we're both Isaiah and Ahaz. Like Ahaz we face our own array of fears. Instead of Israel, Aram, and Assyria we have our bills and debts, or our addictions, or the pressure to buy more, or the desire to hoard what we have. Instead of Judah demanding action we have our own family and friends. Our troubles, no matter how great or small, drive us to despair. The gospel tells us to play it cool. We have those glimpses of God like Isaiah does; we have a revelation. We know from worship that we depend entirely

upon God and that God is good for it. We have knelt before God with our Brothers and Sisters in Christ and asked for forgiveness...and we have received it! We have stood forgiven and praised God in song and prayer. We have eaten God's meal. We have experienced the Gospel. God knows you. God knows every inch of you. God knows your dirty little secrets. God knows what makes you cry. God knows what gives you joy. God knows that you're angry with someone you love. God knows that you have a weakness for ice cream. God knows just how much stress you can handle...and God's seen you overloaded with it more than a few times. God knows everything about you and God loves you. God has a grand palace, at least according to Isaiah, but God gives it up. God gives up that dress with the long train. God gives up the singing angels and the heavenly armies and becomes a guy nailed to a tree so that nothing stands between us. God is madly in love with you, and when our fears mount God tells us, "Play it cool. You can trust me. Now, you don't have to go home, but you can't stay here."

Our revelation becomes our mission. As God sent Isaiah into his scary world God sends us into a scary world to bear the good news. And the world needs it. Just this Tuesday I awoke to the headline that so-called Evangelicals the world over were praying ardently because it was Devil Day, the Day of the Antichrist, June 6, 2006 or 6-6-6. There were bomb threats, sightings of the antichrist, even specials on the History Channel. Friends of Christ, the World needs to know: What have you seen? Have you knelt with your Brothers and Sisters in Christ before God, asked for forgiveness, and been forgiven? Have you been able to sing

praises to God? Have you heard the good news of God's endless love and promise of salvation? Have you eaten and drunk the flesh and blood of the God who died for you? Friends of Christ we have done these things, and the God who comes to us in these things is beyond our understanding. God is not confined to a date on a calendar, to the words on the page, to the preacher's voice or the bread and wine. God is more than we'll ever understand, yet through Christ we know that we can trust God, and we know what God asks of us. God's message is clear: tell them what you have seen. Feed the hungry, care for the sick, heal the ills and divisions of this world, forgive, love, love your neighbors, love your enemies. This is the work of the God revealed to us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit right here, right now, and when the revelation ends you don't have to go home, but you can't stay here. Amen