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A Loving, Beloved Community 3 – Healing – Isaiah 6:1-7

A loving, beloved community should be many things: a place to grow, to feel secure, a place to love and be loved confident in the support of the rest of the community. It should be people who will support you, give you honesty, and in all that, be a place of healing. That's what the church should be, and what the community of the church should be about – support for the hard work of being disciples in the world.

But I'm dreaming, right? Sure, many churches including Valley do all these things: sometimes, with some people; yet we continue to be considered unfriendly, cold, and preoccupied with everything *but* one another's wounds suffered in the living of life. The question we need to ask ourselves is, are those perceptions accurate? And even more importantly, how are we striving to do better?

As a loving community beloved by God, we should do better. We should be a place where healing can be found, a place where healing is offered, an example of health to the world, not a source of new hurt. But

we are made up of human beings, and that means we fall short of those lofty goals.

What's the best part of being a community? That's easy: the people. What's the hardest part about being a community? Well, that's an easy answer, too: the people. And the way that most people get sideways with each other most of the time is with their mouths – or at least in communication. I think that's why Isaiah identifies his lips and the lips of his people as the sinful problem when he's confronted with God in this passage.

When words are spoken (and I mean *words*, not just words), relationships get broken or at least damaged. And when that happens, the community is injured. It hurts. These things break down the bond of community.

What a loving, beloved community needs to do when that happens is heal and offer healing. That brings along its own set of problems.

Some things, once said, can't be unsaid. Even though you apologize, even though that apology is accepted, the words can't be taken back, and sometimes they hang like fog obscuring your view of the other person – whether you said them, or they did. You avoid one another, you don't speak to each other – you undo community, two people at a time. Healing, at the community level, begins with healing between individuals. And while words can't be un-spoken, we can

change, with God's help, so that what was said no longer has any meaning and the fog is dispelled. We can effectively let God's winged creature touch our lips with the glowing coal, have our hurtful mouths cauterized, so that we can be healed.

Remember getting called on the carpet for something you'd done? That emphatic intoning of your *full* name, the timbre of the voice, the sudden sick feeling in the gut that the time of reckoning for whatever you'd done (or not done) was near?

I haven't felt that way for days! But I *do* remember what it's like, and that's what Isaiah felt when he suddenly found himself in the holiest part of the temple with God himself. Oh, dear.

No matter how good you are or have been, facing your maker is (or at least ought to be) a terrifying thing to contemplate. No matter how good you are, no matter how exemplary your life, there's still going to be pieces that just aren't pretty. And Isaiah's replaying his right that minute.

The truth is, every one of us has *something*, however small or inconsequential to others, something that we still feel badly about. For example, Augustine, the great pillar of the Christian Church and theologian, could not let go of a time he stole pears from a neighbor's tree in childhood.

Isaiah is suddenly aware of and confronted by his unworthiness, his failings. But God takes them away – burns them away. Not that they'd never happened, but they no longer applied.

Isaiah's failings didn't disqualify him from being used as God's mouthpiece to his people, not once he'd been made clean, made whole again by God's own direction. Neither do our own failings disqualify us.

Healing in the loving, beloved community is about repairing our relationships with each other, but more fundamentally, it's about repairing our relationship with God. God does his part: we are forgiven every time we ask. But we throw away that forgiveness and keep on the way we always have.

After Isaiah is made whole, then, he is given a task: (vv. 8-10). He is called to preach to the rest of the people about God. Tell them about what they're doing, even though the telling is likely to drive them away. Speak to them, use words, knowing that if they truly hear those words and realize what God is doing, reaching out to them, they will turn from their ways, and be healed.

Isaiah's healing gives him the ability, presents him with the call to use the words God gives him to say, and through them work for the healing of the whole people – his message is God's plea to his people to turn and be healed.

We are healed and called to heal, too. God works in and through community to heal – not just the damage between individuals within the church, but in the greater world beyond our walls. We are called to be agents of reconciliation – another name for healing between people, in relationships – for God’s whole world.

But one of the reasons we’re not as good at that as we should be is because we don’t have the best track record with healing within our own community. We can, and we should, change that, one person at a time. You can choose whether to work toward healing, or let wounds fester.

We are called to be a healing community, beloved by God, and that means we should treat each other with love (even if we don’t like that person), and speak words that draw wounds together, people together, words that heal. And we do that by owning up to our own harsh or misguided words, by sharing that another’s words toward us or someone else hurt. Sometimes, that can push them away, like Isaiah’s message from God – but the truth can be hard to hear.

When we do that, when we acknowledge what words have done, we’re invoking God into the hurt, asking for God to join us as we seek to make it better – to, as God says to Isaiah, “turn, and be healed.”

Is that easy? Heavens, no, though it can be a lot easier than we imagine it to be. Honestly, though, it can seem nearly impossible, given the enmity of a relationship that may go back years. But that doesn’t

mean that it is impossible, and with God working through our beloved community, through us, it should be the way we serve God together as we meet to grow, as we come together to break bread, as we gather to serve, and especially as we worship the God who loves us and wants all to be reconciled to one another and to him.

As a wise person once said, “If you must have the last word, make it two: I’m sorry.” With God’s help, perhaps we can, and be healers of one another and the world.