

One of my favorite episodes from television came in the first season of The West Wing, when President Bartlett described “AMERICA, America IS A HARD CONCEPT! HOW DO YOU COMPREHEND A NATION WHOSE SYMBOL OF JUSTICE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, IDENTITY & FREEDOM IS OUR FLAG, and WHOSE CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES CITIZENS THE RIGHT TO BURN THAT FLAG AS A PROTEST?”

How simple life would be if we were only SUBJECTs.

Christian Faith in the Trinity of God, adds depth and complexity to our lives.

As Creatures, we exist, we have being and endure, just as the Mountains and Deserts around us. As Living Beings, we have breath in our lungs, blood coursing through our hearts and veins. As Humans we have Freedom of Will to make choices, in particular whether to love God or ignore God. As Believers, we trust God to be God, so that we do need to try to be in absolute control. HOWEVER, ADDED to this, Christianity holds in balance that we know the Only God in 3 identities: as OMnipotent CREATOR of everything imaginary and real, who is the Ultimate Judge at the end of time; as Jesus who is EMMANUEL, GOD who chooses to be One with us in life, the Messiah, the pioneer and perfecter of Salvation, our LORD and Savior, the second Adam, the first born of the Dead, of Resurrection, who watches over us acting for forgiveness; and for 2000 years we have lived in response to THE HOLY SPIRIT; AND these are not historically differentiated, but GOD is continuing to Create around us even now today, Jesus is continuing to work out our Salvation, and the Holy Spirit continues to blow over and enflame us; ALL OF WHICH is demonstrated every instant of our lives, in the reality that GOD LOVES YOU.

The best known description of the Kingdom of God comes from this 6th Chapter of Isaiah.

We know Isaiah to have been a Prophet, one of the Major Prophets (meaning the Book of his name has 66 Chapters, as opposed to Haggai with 2 Chapters, Nahum and Habakkuk with 3). But also, different from the other OT Prophets who were outsiders, because Isaiah was a Priest, he was THE High Priest of Judaism at Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem.

There is a reference here, that King Uzziah the 10th King of the Southern Nation of Judah died, and as High Priest of the Temple, Isaiah was presiding over the State Funeral. In that age, Heads of State would not have flown in on Air Force One, or their private Jet, instead there would have been immense, ornate caravans of Royalty, from all the Nations of the World with their entourage and gifts. The closest reference we have to this occurred in the last year, as all of the relics and sarcophagi of the Ancient Pharaohs were transported from the old Museum to the new one, in a ROYAL FUNERAL PROCESSION. Even thousands of years after their deaths, they had full military honors, bands and the finest, the world could provide.

The State Funeral of King Uzziah, is witnessed by The High Priest of Solomon’s Temple: Isaiah; providing contrast to Isaiah raising his vision to witness to Kingdom of God! Compared to the magnificence of all the elaborate elements of the State Funeral at the Temple of Solomon, Isaiah saw the LORD seated upon GOD’s Throne, high and lifted up; even the Train of GOD’s Robes completely filled the Temple.

In addition to the difference in realities by size, there are Holy creatures of GLORY, so different from our Pageantry, that these are 6 Winged Serpentine Angelic Guards (who cover their faces so as to not look on the face of God; who cover their lower extremities so as to not be embarrassed; the magnitude of even those wings is that with the 3rd Pair of wings these Dragons were able to fly!

The Seraphim do not speak in ordinary prose, Hiss as Snakes or cry as Birds, but sing the Glory of God’s kingdom by continually crying out “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts, the whole earth is full of God’s glory!”

As a witness to the Glory and Majesty of the Holy Kingdom of God, Isaiah has an attack of humility!

Who am I to be in the presence of God? Isaiah is The Ordained High Priest, in the lineage of Levitical Priests, the equivalent of the POPE over all of SOLOMON'S TEMPLE at Jerusalem. As a Priest, there is a bit of Self-Aggrandizement. Personally, I have been given authority over every person's offerings and sacrifices, even over the last disposition of the King!

YET, Isaiah recognizes his own mortality and sin, I AM a man of unclean lips, who dwells among a sinful people of unclean lips.

Recently, someone asked me, "Why do we need Confession every Week?" Often times I have not done those particular sins, so why confess to what I have not done? There are 3 answers I can think of: FIRST, that like Isaiah, I am a Man among a Sinful Humanity, so this is Confession for the Sins of the World. SECOND, that Confession can be confession of our sinful humanity or confession of the majesty of GOD. THIRD, that the emphasis is not on our SINS, but regularly for us to hear THE ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS IN JESUS CHRIST. Isaiah did not have the Assurance of Christ's Forgiveness, so for the same purpose, one of the Seraph touch his lips with a burning coal, cauterizing the sin from his mouth.

AND YET, All of this: the Funeral of Uzziah (the King of Judah at Jerusalem), Isaiah's witness of the Kingdom of God, the holiness of the Seraphim, his recognition of his own sin and all the sins of humanity, God taking away Isaiah's sin for him, ALL of this, only serves to set up, what happened in the CALL of ISAIAH, from Priest to Prophet. When the Forgiven Isaiah hears the request "Whom shall we send, who will go for us?" Isaiah replies "Here am I, send me."

There is an arrogance of Pride for each of us in those words. "Here Am I Send Me". Volunteering to be used by GOD, not for our own purposes but as an instrument of God's Will, without knowing the full context into which we will be sent.

At age 40, Refugees we had been sponsoring called together the leadership of the church and announced that the United States was helping to broker an end to the Civil War that had ravaged their Nation for 25 years. The last time they had seen their parents, the Lost Boys had fled from their villages when they were 5-10 years of age and walked 3000 miles first to Ethiopia then to Kenya, then as Refugees came to America. Yet as South Sudanese Refugees they could not go to Africa, as they then could not return here. They described knowing it was a huge thing to ask, but did we know of anyone, who would leave their home and family and work here, to go into a warzone, without electricity or running water, to try to find their families for them? Now I graduated from High School the year that Registration for the Viet name Draft ended. While I had no interest going to war, I knew that many of my classmates in the years before us had gone and never returned, or returned being called Baby-killers and spit-upon, so felt an anxiety at not having been required to even register. After a long pause, I stated that I did not want to presume too much but had been hearing this passage "Here am I send me." The refugees were in shock, that their pastor would do this for them. It did not seem a great burden, but it did change me. I recall arriving at the airport in Nairobi, feeling self-assured and very white, then quite helpless as I had been warned to not trust Cab Drivers or Police and the person who was supposed to meet me did not come. Two weeks later, when I flew back to the Nairobi airport from reuniting over 100 families in South Sudan, I recall feeling I never needed to feel helpless again.

But the meat of this Call of Isaiah, comes beginning in the 9th verse:

Say to this people Hear and Listen, but do not understand!

Look and see but do not perceive!

Make the heart of this people fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes closed,

lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.”

All of which this MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND reminds me of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. We read it as school children, we have seen the words carved into the Lincoln Monument, folklore says that the President wrote these words on the back of an envelope while aboard a train, coming to dedicate the Cemetery of both the Union and Confederacy on Nov 19, 1863. BUT DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT IT SAYS?

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.