

*FIFTH SUNDAY - FEBRUARY 7, 2016*

*THERE IS A SAYING, PERHAPS YOU HAVE HEARD IT:*

*"WHEN YOU GET TO YOUR WIT'S END, YOU'LL FIND GOD LIVES THERE"*

*OR SIMILAR - "WHEN WE BREAKDOWN, THE SPIRIT CAN BREAK IN"*

*OUR READINGS TODAY FROM ISAIAH AND LUKE ARE GOOD EXAMPLES*

*OF THAT BELIEF..*

*ISAIAH LIVED IN TROUBLED TIMES. HIS NATION WAS DIVIDED ASUNDER-*

*NORTH AND SOUTH....*

*THE NORTH WAS CONQUERED BY THE ASSYRIANS AND MOST OF ITS*

*CITIZENS WERE CARRIED OFF INTO CAPTIVITY...*

*THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM, WHERE ISAIAH LIVED, WAS RAGED BY WAR....*

*THERE WAS VERY LITTLE TEMPLE WORSHIP.....*

*THE MORAL AND ETHICAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE WAS IN SHAMBLES*

*KING UZZIAH, WHO HAD BEEN A WISE AND TRUSTED LEADER, FELL INTO*

*DISREPUTE AND DIED IN DISHONOR.*

*THE OUTLOOK WAS BLEEK....*

*SURROUNDED BY THAT SEEMINGLY HOPELESS CIRCUMSTANCE ISAIAH*

*MADE HIS WAY TO THE TEMPLE....NO DOUBT AT HIS WIT'S END*

*THEN HE SAW A VISION OF THE MAJESTY AND HOLINESS OF GOD.....*

*HE EXPERIENCED THE TRANSCENDENT...THE WHOLLY OTHER.*

*AT FIRST, IT PLUNGED HIM INTO DESPAIR AND HE CRIED:*

*"WOE IS ME, I AM DOOMED. FOR I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAR LIPS, LIVING*

*AMONG A PEOPLE OF UNCLEAR LIPS."*

*BUT THEN CAME A SENSE OF CLEANSING, FOLLOWED BY A CALL TO SERVICE.*

*AND ISAIAH ANSWERED, "HERE I AM, SEND ME."*

*PETER'S EXPERIENCE IN OUR GOSPEL READING IS NOT UNLIKE ISAIAH'S...*

*PETER AND HIS FELLOW FISHERMAN HAD AN UNSUCCESSFUL NIGHT FISHING AND GAVE UP - WHEN JESUS SUGGESTED THAT THEY THROW THEIR NETS OUT INTO THE DEEP.....*

*WE KNOW THE REST OF THE STORY, WHICH INCLUDES PETER FALLING ON HIS KNEES AND SAYING,*

*"DEPART FROM ME, LORD, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN."*

*BUT JESUS RESPONDS WITH "DO NOT BE AFRAID; FROM NOW ON YOU WILL BE CATCHING MEN"*

*BOTH MEN EXPERIENCED THE TRANSCENDENT, THE SPIRIT, THE POWER OF GOD IN DIRE CIRCUMSTANCES...*

*BOTH MEN WERE FILLED WITH AWE AND THEIR OWN SINFULNESS...*

*BOTH MEN WERE AFFIRMED, CLEANSED, TOLD NOT TO BE AFRAID....*

*THE SPIRIT HAS PLANS FOR THEM....*

*WE LIVE IN A CULTURE THAT DOES NOT AFFIRM THE EXISTENCE OF TRANSCENDENT REALITIES...*

*POWER, MONEY AND PLESURE REIGN SUPREME AS THE VALUES BY WHICH TO MEASURE OUR LIVES AND HAPPINESS....*

*OUR HUMAN WILL IS WORSHIPED AS THE ULTIMATE REALITY....*

*THERE IS NO STANDARD OF TRUTH AND GOODNESS OUTSIDE OF US,  
BEFORE WHICH OUR WILLS MUST BOW...*

*WE MAKE THE TRUTH....*

*WE BRING ABOUT WHAT IS GOOD...*

*AND "NOBODY HAS THE RIGHT TO TELL ME WHAT TO DO"*

*WE CELEBRATE OPENNESS.....BUT OFTEN ONLY AN OPENNESS TO  
OUR OWN PROJECTIONS ....*

*RARELY ARE WE OPEN TO THE WHOLLY OTHER - SOME OTHER THAT  
TRANSCENDS THE MIRROR IMAGES OF OUR EGO, CLASS, IDEOLOGY OR  
NATION....*

*OUR OPENNESS IS PRECISELY NOT TO TRANSCENDENCE....*

*WHETHER WITHIN US OR OUTSIDE OF US...*

*TRUE TRANSCENDENCE IS SOMETHING ELSE ALTOGETHER THAN WHAT  
WE TYPICALLY EXPERIENCE....*

*ISAIAH KNEW HE WAS IN THE PRESENCE OF SOME REALITY HIGHER AND  
LOFTIER THAN ANY HUMAN OR EARTHLY THRONE...*

*"HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD GOD OF HOSTS. HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE  
FULL OF YOUR GLORY"*

*ISAIAH'S EARTHLY HOUSE SHOOK AND BILLOWED WITH SMOKE....*

*HE BECAME IMMEDIATELY AWARE OF HIS PALTRY AND SINFUL  
CONDITION.....*

*THIS ENCOUNTER WITH HIGH MYSTERY, UTTERLY BEYOND HIM,  
SHATTERED ANY DELUSION OF GRANDEUR HE MIGHT HAVE HAD...*

*ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE AWESOME IS MATCHED BY PETER'S EXPERIENCE OF A SUPERB SHOW OF POWER BEYOND HUMAN RECKONING AND PETER ADORES THE AWESOME MYSTERY HE HAS WITNESSED AND HE IS SUDDENTLY CONSCIOUS OF HIS SINFULNESS, LIKE ISAIAH...*

*"LEAVE ME LORD, I AM A SINFUL MAN"*

*THE MOMENT WE RECOGNIZE OUR INADEQUACY, OUR SIN, OUR FALSE SELF, OUR SMALLNESS BEFORE THE GREATNESS OF THE TRANSCENDENT GOD, WE ARE CAPABLE OF BEING CALLED OUT OF OURSELVES...*

*WE ARE CAPABLE OF BEING IN TOUCH WITH OUR TRUE SELF....*

*SO WHEN GOD IS HEARD TO SAY, "WHOM SHALL I SEND?"*

*ISAIAH RESPONDS, "HERE I AM SEND ME."*

*HE IS EMPOWERED, NOT PARALYZED.....*

*HE RESPONDS OUT OF HIS TRUE SELF...*

*HUMAN ENCOUNTER WITH A TRANSCENDENT GOD HAS ALWAYS MET WITH RESISTANCE.....*

*OUR PRAYER TOGETHER ON SUNDAY IS MEANT TO ENABLE US TO ENCOUNTER THE TRANSCENDENT, COMPASSIONATE ONE....*

*HENCE, WE ENCOURAGE EVERYONE WHEN ENTERING THE CHAPEL TO EITHER BOW OR GENUFLECT....*

*WE BEGIN WITH A MOMENT OF SILENCE - ACKNOWLEDGE THE WHOLLY OTHER*

***WE BEGIN THE EUCHARIST PROPER WITH A PENITENTIAL RITE.....***

***RECALLING OUR OWN SINFULNESS, OUR OWN FALSE SELF, NOT TO SHAME OURSELVES BUT TO EXPOSE OUR TRUE SELF BEFORE OUR GRACIOUS GOD.....***

***AND MOST OF ALL, IN THE PENITENTIAL RITE WE RECALL THE AWESOME TRANSCENDENT OCEAN OF MERCY OF OUR COMPASSIONATE CREATOR....***

***AND AS WE BEGIN THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER, WE SING OUT THE WORDS OF ISAIAH, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD OF HOSTS, HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF YOUR GLORY.....***

***WE REMIND OURSELVES THROUGHOUT THIS MORNING OF A TRANSCENDENT WHOLLY OTHER MYSTERIOUS GOD, WHO IS ALSO AMONG US AND WITHIN US.....***

***A GRACIOUS, AWESOME AND MERCIFUL PRESENCE WHO WE CAN ALWAYS TRUST AND DRAW UPON FOR STRENGTH AND MEANING IN OUR LIVES...***

***LET US GIVE THANKS FOR THAT PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES AND CALL OUT: "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD OF HOSTS - HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF YOUR GLORY....."***