**Touched by God. February 6 2022 Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11**

I understand that - Sunflowers can take up high concentration of toxic materials and are adept at extracting radioactive metals from a particular place in a period of 3-4years. Neutron stars have a mass bigger than 10 suns and yet are the smallest and most dense stars known to exist in the universe.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The atmosphere on Neptune and Uranus can cause it to rain diamonds. Scientists can turn plastic into vanilla flavouring.[[2]](#footnote-2) The wonders of our universe can be quite startling. They can produce a sense of awe and wonder. Some people become so intrigued by these insights that they give their working lives to seeking to understand the mysteries of our universe. Likewise encounters with the God of the Universe change people’s lives.

**Revelation**

Isaiah encountered the magnificence of God in a miraculous vision. It is a beautiful scene and it is worthwhile lingering with the description. Isaiah’s eyes were fixed upon the Lord seated on a Throne. The dimensions challenge our comprehension – “the **hem of his robe** filled the temple” so how big was this being!! Heavenly beings were positioned above the Lord and they began to describe the Lord. *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”* The Lord of hosts is the leader of all, all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. This earth is filled with God’s glory, with signs of God’s involvement in our world, pointers to the character of God demonstrated through the wonder of all of creation, and particularly through God’s work in and through humankind. All the earth knowingly or unknowingly points to the glory of God.

Overwhelmingly the holiness of God is impressed on the mind of Isaiah. The seraphs are likewise in awe of the Lord. They covered their faces, the vision was overwhelming, the covered their feet, as a symbol of being aware of their nakedness, their exposure before the Lord. Then the whole building begins to shake and smoke fills the building, similar phenomena to that experienced by Moses on Mt Sinai. The reality is clear Isaiah has been confronted by God in all God’s splendour and holiness. This holiness encompasses the concept of the Lord being transcendent, so uniquely surpassing our comprehension, elevated beyond our highest perception, awe inspiring. This holiness also encompasses absolute ethical purity, The Lord is the only one who demonstrates such purity.[[3]](#footnote-3)

To be in God’s Presence is mysterious and awe inspiring. To encounter the presence of God is also to be confronted with one’s own imperfections.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Our New Testament reading reminds us that encountering the presence of God need not happen just in a surreal type of experience. You could just be going about your normal life. You could have had a completely unproductive night out fishing.

Prior to this event, Peter has experienced Jesus teaching[[5]](#footnote-5) and witnessed his power[[6]](#footnote-6). This may have prepared the way for his swift obedience even in circumstances that seemed illogical. He chose to do what Jesus told him to do, even though there is no evidence that Jesus knew anything much about fishing. It appears that Peter was already beginning to see Jesus was no ordinary man and hence he addressed Jesus as Master. [[7]](#footnote-7)

**Reaction**

In both of these scenarios Peter and Isaiah, when confronted by the presence of God respond with a recognition of their own sin and unworthiness. Isaiah out of deep inner conviction says, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips”[[8]](#footnote-8) and Peter falls down before Jesus and says, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man”.[[9]](#footnote-9) They both recognise the vast gap there is between themselves and the One they have encountered. Isaiah also recognises that this is not just his own state but the state of all his people.[[10]](#footnote-10) Yet they are not left in this state. Isaiah is touched by God, in such a way that demonstrates that his sin is forgiven, and that he is thus prepared for the mission God has for him. The symbolic live coal from the altar poignantly touched his lips, the lips he deemed to be unclean, the lips he would use to fulfil his prophetic ministry. Then he received the reassurance that he is fully forgiven, “your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Through words and actions Isaiah is reassured that he has been purified.

Peter is reassured that he does not need to be afraid and that Jesus is preparing for a time when he will catch people rather than fish! The passage continues to build for us the picture of Jesus, the friend of sinners.

To be confronted by the presence of God understandably produces a sense of apprehension, and a measure of reluctance or reticence associated with the overwhelming nature of the experience. It is part of the integrity of the call that these two men recognised their unworthiness and inadequacy for such a calling. The disciples had “done nothing to warrant or merit Jesus’ call to them”, …they were “not called because of their qualifications, character or potential. God’s call is as unpredictable as it is unmerited”.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In Scripture “one is allowed to resist, to disagree with, and to challenge even the God whose glory fills the whole earth. Questions are always allowed.”[[13]](#footnote-13) However there is an expectation that their hearts and minds are open for God to respond, to reassure, to encourage and to equip.

**Result**

Their calls were costly. The disciples left all and followed Jesus, this had economic, vocational and social implications. They will now find their fundamental sense of belonging, meaning and purpose in their relationship with Jesus.[[14]](#footnote-14) Isaiah was called to an undisclosed commission. Then after responding he discovers that he will need to bring an enormously challenging message to his people, a message that highlighted their stubborn disobedience and rejection of God. It was a message that highlighted their distancing themselves from God, they are even addressed as “this people” rather than “my people”.[[15]](#footnote-15) Isaiah, like Peter is able to respond positively because he has already encountered the amazing presence of God, the awesome and gracious presence of God.

Their responses to the call of God were voluntary. There was a choice for Isaiah and for Peter. Making such a choice initiates a process of deep commitment.

**For us**

So today God continues to initiate encounters with us even when we may be in the midst of common everyday tasks. So it is important that we are open to God speaking to us, showing us something new, reassuring us, challenging us.

As we approach Holy Communion today we are reminded of the depths of God’s love for us in the gift of Jesus, who in his death dealt with our sin and shame, and in whose resurrection we have the reality of transformation and new life. We are reminded that God has bridged the distance between us and God, and that we can experience the presence of God with us at all times. We are reminded that God can touch us bring forgiveness, healing and a new sense of call.

God calls each of us to follow Jesus. To be lights in our communities despite our unworthiness and inadequacies. God may call us to bring some challenging message to others. Yet God also equips us for all that we may encounter along the way.

1. https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/5-amazing-science-facts-that-will-blow-your-mind-1876923-2021-11-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.rd.com/list/science-facts-never-learned/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Allan Harman, *Isaiah,*(Scotland: Christian Focus, 2011)81 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gene M. Tucker,, “Isaiah: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al. (Eds) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2001) 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Luke 5:3b [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Luke 4:38 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Joel Green, *Luke,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997) 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Isaiah 6:5a NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Luke 5:8b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Isaiah 1:4-6; 6:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Isaiah 6:7b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al. (Eds) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 118 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Tucker, “Isaiah: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 104 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Green, *Luke,* 235 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Isaiah 6:10 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-15)