

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

<sup>4</sup> *At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

<sup>5</sup> *“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”*

<sup>6</sup> *Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*

<sup>8</sup> *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”  
And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:1-8)*

### Send Me!

When I was 16, I got my driver’s license. Can you guess what happened in the weeks that followed? Any time my mom needed to run to the grocery store or the bank or the post office, I would jump up and say, “I’ll go!” Why did I do that? Because I wanted to drive the car. It was cool to do that. It made me feel grown up and it was just fun. Now, I’ve been on the other side of the keys, if you like, and had my kids volunteer to run various errands just because they wanted to drive the car. But like most parents, I have not found that my kids are quite as quick to volunteer for less enjoyable jobs. When the bathroom needs to be cleaned, we rarely hear, “Let me do that!” If an animal dumps the garbage cans and someone needs to clean up the mess, we don’t have competing voices shouting, “Let me go!” The truth is, I wouldn’t volunteer for those things either, if someone else would do them. What’s true at home is probably true at work and at school and at church. There are always jobs that need to be done. Some are more fun. Some are easier to find volunteers for. And some jobs seem to be very hard to fill. Obviously, this morning, I do want to focus on the church. In our Old Testament lesson, we have an example of God looking for a volunteer and getting one. This morning, we are blessed to install a new teacher who has also volunteered to serve in God’s kingdom. But these words can have a wider application than that. Anyone who serves in the church, anyone who is willing to step up and do the work God gives us to do, is really echoing Isaiah’s words: **Send me!**

#### I.

But that is especially true in the public ministry and even more so in the way that we call our pastors and teachers in the WELS. In our system, pastors and teachers begin their ministries by placing their lives into the Lord’s hands. They allow themselves to simply be assigned to their first call. That can mean going to the other side of the country or even to the other side of the world. It can mean being separated from family and friends – many pastors and teachers never get to live close to their children’s grandparents. A week ago, when we had that record cold snap, one of the younger pastors in our district told me his California wife was regretting marrying him that week. People who love winter sometimes get assigned to Florida and people who hate winter can find themselves in International Falls, Minnesota. Why would anyone submit to that kind of a system? For the same reason that Isaiah blindly committed to whatever God had in mind for his ministry. **Send me because I know your grace.**

Isaiah had a vision. He was standing in heaven and he saw the Lord seated on a high throne. The train of his robe filled the temple – not the physical temple in Jerusalem, but the real temple, God’s throne room in heaven. The roof of God’s temple in heaven is apparently really high because Isaiah saw angels flying above God’s head, soaring on two wings, while two other sets of wings modestly hid their faces and their feet. And those angels cried aloud, **“Holy, holy, holy is God the LORD almighty! The whole earth is full of his glory!”**

In Hebrew, their cry almost sounds like thunder: *Qadosh! Qadosh! Qadosh!* – Holy! Holy! Holy! At that cry, the foundations of the temple shook and smoke filled the room.

Isaiah saw God in all his glory. How would you respond to seeing that? Isn't there a part of you that would love that? We spend our whole lives waiting to see Jesus. As we see how bad this world really is, we often sigh, "Come, Lord Jesus!" I once was in the hospital room with a lady whose sister was dying and I heard her whisper to that sister, "When you see Jesus, don't look back! Run to him!" But that's not how Isaiah reacted. He was afraid. **"Woe to me!"** he cried. **"I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."**

Why was he so terrified? Because he was a sinner and he knew it. We like to tell ourselves that we're pretty good people. But there's only one reason we can get away with that: other people are worse. The prisons are full of people who are bigger sinners than we are. And most of us are pretty good at sizing other people up and finding a way to make ourselves look better than they do, at least in our own minds. But if we ever actually had to stand in the presence of a holy person, we couldn't do that. We wouldn't be able to pretend anymore. We would see just how sinful we really are. That's what happened to Isaiah. He focused on his lips, because what comes out of our mouths usually gives a pretty good picture of what's in our hearts. Every sinful word he ever spoke betrayed his selfishness and lust and lack of commitment to the Lord. Isaiah knew the Old Testament scriptures. He knew God had said that no person could see his face and live. He expected God to strike him dead at that moment and he knew he deserved it.

But then an angel flew to him holding a burning coal that he had taken off of the altar. Israel's worship was very different from ours. They offered animal sacrifices and incense which they burned on two different altars. The angel touched Isaiah's lips with that live coal – the lips symbolized everything that was wrong with him and his people, the lips that revealed so much of his sin, again and again. Then the angel said, **"See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."**

Why did the coal do that? Not because it hurt. Isaiah gives no indication that his lips were burned or in pain. He didn't pay for his sin with his suffering. Rather, the coal connected his lips and his heart to the sacrifice God himself offered. Old Testament worship revolved around sacrifice. Every animal that was slaughtered to pay for sin represented Jesus who would one day lay down his life to pay for all our sin. Isaiah didn't offer that sacrifice. God did. And then God sent a messenger to apply that sacrifice personally to Isaiah. God came to a man who was struck by the reality of his sin and guilt and God took that sin away and healed his sense of guilt.

And what happened next? God needed a preacher and Isaiah shouted, **"Here am I. Send me!"** Why did he shout that? Because he was forgiven. Because his heart was filled with joy and faith. Do you see the connection, my friends? What is the number one qualification to serve as your pastor or as a teacher in your school or even as a leader in your congregation? Faith in Christ as our Savior. In just a few minutes, we're going to commission and install our new teacher. He has a degree in teaching. He's had all kinds of special training. He's a very gifted young man. But first and foremost, he is volunteering to serve in God's kingdom today because he knows that even though he is a sinner who deserves only death and hell, Christ has given him life and heaven. That is what qualifies him to serve us. That is the only good reason any young man or young woman would present himself or herself to the church for a call to serve. Thank God that he has given us not just one, but a whole faculty of servants of the gospel.

## II.

Last week, I needed a picture of Mr. Henning, our new teacher. Someone was in the building holding a baby and I joked that I could just take a picture of the baby and put Mr. Henning's name next to it, because from my aged perspective, there's not that much difference. I mean, his wife went to high school with me kids. I was joking, of course. But most ministers do start out young. 25 years ago, I was the baby faced young pastor. And on the day that Isaiah saw his vision, he was probably the baby faced young prophet. One of the things that young pastors and teachers and probably even young prophets have to get used to is the need to inspire the confidence of older members. To do that, young ministers like John and ancient ministers like me need to remember that it's not about us and our abilities. It's about God's call to serve. When we present ourselves to the Lord of the Church and express our willingness to serve in his kingdom, we're doing that because God himself tells us to pray for workers and because God himself established the ministry. Every pastor and teacher

can begin his or her ministry with this prayer: **send me, because you, O Lord, choose to work through ministers.**

Why does he do that? Well, in the end, we have to admit that God never explains his thinking to us on this. God simply chooses to hide himself in a sinful world. He hides himself behind all the ordinary things that he uses to take care of us, like jobs and education and doctors and police officers. He hides himself even behind pain and suffering as he works all things for the good of his church. He hides himself behind the means of grace that he has given us: behind the word and the sacraments, things that seem so ordinary that the unbelieving world can only mock them. And he hides himself behind human, sinful pastors and teachers that he calls to proclaim that word and administer those sacraments.

That's about all he tells us. But I think we can safely make a few observations. God gives us pastors and teachers who personally understand sin and grace. He doesn't send perfect angels to proclaim the gospel to us – even they did that sometimes in the Bible. God gives us people who understand how hard it is to live under the cross, people who wrestle with their own sin and need to go their Savior every day, so that when we members or we students struggle with sin and when we feel defeated and when we're afraid or sad or hurt, those pastors and teachers understand what that's like and how to use the law and the gospel to help us.

In the end, that's all that God calls us ministers to do: properly share the law and the gospel. We pastors do it one way. Teachers have a different kind of ministry, so they do it with a subset of the congregation, and in a somewhat different way. But in the end, the heart and soul of ministry is dealing with sin and grace. It's making sure that all of us examine our words and actions and what those things say about our hearts. All pastors and teachers need to point out that we are men and women of unclean lips who live among people of unclean lips. But then God calls us to proclaim Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, who took our sins away. That forgiveness then gives God's people the same joy and the same willingness to serve that Isaiah had.

John, you are going to spend a lot of your day teaching math and English and social studies. You're going to supervise the playground and participate in fire drills and work on socialization and academic growth and helping kids develop their physical abilities. But the heart of your ministry will always be the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. We've called you to teach the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade about Jesus. That is your most important task. God has called you through us to discipline children as his lambs, to lead them to repentance and faith. God has called you to be an example to all the children in our school and to love them as he loves them. Does that scare you? It should. You and I are people of unclean lips and we live among a nation of unclean lips. The sin in our hearts is going to get in the way sometimes. We are going to fail to be the ministers God calls us to be sometimes. We are sinners and it is inevitable.

But the Holy Spirit still called us. Jesus died and paid for all our sins, already two thousand years ago. He rose to tell us that we are forgiven for every failure in our ministry. His blood has washed all that sin away. Now because he loves us, he may allow us to wrestle with mistakes we make and the fallout that comes from them. But that's him teaching us to serve him better. The joy in our ministry doesn't come from how talented or successful or popular we are. It comes from knowing that our sin is paid for. It comes from being chosen by God to be part of his great work of sharing the gospel and training Christian children to live their faith and helping them to walk the narrow road to heaven. God called you to be a part of our ministry so that you can do all that. So jump up and say, "Here am I! Send me!" And trust that God will bless your efforts. Amen.