

## Understand???

Have you ever been having a conversation with someone and realised you could not comprehend what they were saying? You understood the language itself, but were unable to make out what their words meant? Most people refer to that as a parallel conversation. It happens much more often than we think it does...especially when trying to decipher what one is saying while wearing a mask.

Today's reading is packed with imagery and hyperbole. I'm going to break the reading into three sections:

First Section - Description of the temple

Second Section - Images of fear, trembling and salvation

Third Section - The servant and God's hyperbole

And then speak a little bit on each one, while attempting to flesh each one out and tie them all together. Wish me luck.

### First Section - Description of the temple

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of [that] robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:  
'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of [God's] glory.' *(Isaiah 6.1-3, NRSV)*

It is believed that King Uzziah died in 739BCE. This section of the reading is written in the first person, to indicate that the person who experienced this was not merely an observer, they were a participant.

Now, for some perspective. Think of the largest Church you've ever seen. Be it a cathedral, a basilica or another place of worship, imagine the largest one. Got it? Now multiply that by a hundred. That would be the size of the temple.

Even in Biblical times, style and size mattered. A person of royalty would have a long hem on their robe. The longer the robe, the more important that particular royal is. The best, most luxurious fabrics were used, think velvet, silk, furs and gold threading.

No expense spared. And so, for a description of the King of Kings, i.e. God, the hem of the robe would, indeed, be very long.

By Contrast, Queen Elizabeth, at her Coronation 70 years ago, wore the Robe of State attached to the shoulders of her dress, an 18-foot long, hand woven silk velvet cloak lined with Canadian ermine that required the assistance of her four maids of honour to carry.

We are told that seraphs were in attendance, six of them. When researching an accurate rendering of a seraph I found images from the sublime to the ridiculous...one rendering had a very large eyeball with six wings. Generally, it is agreed that Seraph were the size of grown men, as though suspended in air, and after greeting one another proclaimed, what we now know as the Sanctus. This proclaimed the greatness of God, the entirety of the earth is filled with the glory of God!

The Sanctus is a hymn of praise which is inserted into the Christian Liturgy during the Eucharist or Communion. And as today is Communion Sunday, we will hear a similar version of these words later in the service.

### Second Section - Images of fear, trembling and salvation

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am [one] of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'

*(Isaiah 6.4-8a, NRSV)*

This section describes a terrible earthquake, produced by the voices of the Seraphs. Something is amiss, and the house fills with smoke. Then our hero cries out in their unworthiness at seeing something they never imagined they would live to see – GOD! It was commonly understood that one would never see the face of God and live.

And as our hero is processing all of what is happening around them, one of the seraphs flew towards them brandishing a hot coal, shoved it in their mouth and said, "Ta da, your sins have been forgiven, no more guilt for you."

And so after suffering horrific burns, and hopefully given some ice to suck on, milk to drink or at the very least chapstick for their lips, our hero hears a plea from GOD in all of God's glory. God says "So, I need someone to go and deliver a message to, well, everybody. Any volunteers?" Stay tuned! Cliffhanger!! Cue upcoming adventure music...

### Third Section - The servant and God's hyperbole

And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'  
And [God] said, 'Go and say to this people:  
"Keep listening, but do not comprehend;  
keep looking, but do not understand."  
Make the mind of this people dull,  
and stop their ears,  
and shut their eyes,  
so that they may not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and comprehend with their minds,  
and turn and be healed.' *(Isaiah 6.8b-10, NRSV)*

Now, if there had been anyone else present, I can assure you that our hero would have been chosen by default because everyone else would have taken a step back, leaving them standing quite alone. But alas, we don't hear of anyone else present and having been recently sanctified, and possibly still in a little bit, or maybe even a lot of shock from the recent injury, our hero volunteers; possibly something along the lines of "Oh! PICK ME!"

Hyperbole is defined as "exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally." This definition could be applied to most, if not all of the Bible, especially the Hebrew Scriptures. It certainly applies in this case...

God then goes on to say that God's people need to listen, but not understand; to see, but not comprehend. Kind of sounds like the study of exegetical theology. God is saying that they want US, the people of God, to deliberately mishear and thus misunderstand what our hero is telling us.

The reading goes on for several more verses and gets darker and darker in tone. God wants our hero to deliver a message that the people will not get. They will hear the words, yet not understand; they will see, yet not comprehend what is before them.

Our hero asks how long this is to last, the non-understanding. And God says, basically, the people will not understand until there are none of them left. Not a generation, not a single person. Not one remaining alive will understand.

Wow, seems like God holds us all in very high esteem, n'est pas? Keep in mind this is hyperbole. Deliberate exaggeration, not to be taken literally. And yet I'm certain there are times when my guardian angel has needed a nap. And Jesus has heard me say something that would cause him to facepalm. And God, well, I can hear her chuckling quite often at my idiocy.

It's been a very long week. From Monday to Friday, I attended a Virtual Conference called "A Cup of Hope" and listened to speakers on a variety of topics. From conflict in the Church, to support for caregivers of those with dementia. From Queer theology to Hip Hop reconciliation. And as much as I feel like we've been living in a microcosm for the past two plus years, it was good to connect with people who have been living the same sort of thing..

I did not come away with answers. I did not come away with any great revelations. I did not attend every session, because there were other things that were more pressing. And not every guest speaker held my attention.

In the midst of this I was putting the AGM packet together for Christ Church and trying to write an Annual Report that wasn't full of gobbledygook. There was a lot of reflecting going on this week. A lot of re-read notes. A lot of pondering and wondering; reflecting and of course, praying.

There are times when I lament the state of the Church and all we have lost through COVID. Yet there is a great light of hope that although we may not know where we are going, God will be with us through it all. The Church today does not look like the Church of my childhood in the late 1960's and '70's. It does not resemble the Church of my Ordination, in 2007. The 31st of January marked my sixth anniversary in Fernie.

I arrived with my Spiritual Advisor and friend Sue, in my red Kia Soul called Aretha, and began a brand new ministry in a brand new place. Four years into

that call I answered another call to a brand new ministry in an untested place. My intention is to retire at age sixty and so we've got just under six more years together, if you'll have me.

All of this to say, I really have no idea where this is going. Some days I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. Yet I'm doing it the best I can, giving 100% of who I am and where I am. The Church will continue to change, because it MUST. It is time, my brothers and sisters, to acknowledge and give thanks for those things on which we were weaned, and embrace those things we once feared – technology, strangers, different liturgies, different styles of ministry.

The Church of “cookie cutter”, “one size fits all” is gone - thanks be to God. The Church of Doctrine first and foremost is gone. She is now about relationships first and foremost. The Church before us is different. She is new and she is ancient. She is hopeful and she is despairing.

And like God did with our hero in the temple, WE are being asked, once again, who will deliver God's message.

Will it be you?

How about you?

Will it be me?

Thankfully there are no Seraph's with hot coals going to burn us before we are sanctified. We have, through our trials and temptations, been forged in the refiners fire, and made strong as steel.

The message today is badly misunderstood, almost as though the people still have their eyes covered and their ears stopped. It's been misunderstood that there is a secret language, and a myriad of impossible tasks. That only a few are chosen, and it certainly wouldn't be any of us, gathered today.

Thankfully, the message itself is quite simple...maybe that's why it's so misunderstood.

Because surely the God of all, who created us from clay, brought chaos into order and gave us brains to think, hearts to love and lips to speak; surely THAT God must have a difficult message, right?

In a word, nope. Jesus is about LOVE. God is about LOVE. The Holy Spirit is about LOVE. And once we wrap ourselves around that, we will know what God knows. We may be flawed, we may be broken, we may be wonderful, we may be virtuous. And every single one of us – without exception, is loved.

If you understand God's message as anything divisive, you're not listening. If you share God's message as judgment, you're not seeing. Once we understand that all are worthy and nothing will ever cause God to walk away from us, then and only then, can we begin to understand God's total and unconditional love.

Now THAT is a message worth sharing.

Let the Church say – Amen!

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Sermon for Epiphany 5, Isaiah 6.1-13, 6 February 2022