

### Week 3

#### Isaiah 6:1-8 "Confess & Listen"

Begin with prayer:

Forgiving God,

As we enter into this time together, we pray for courage and humility. We ask that you will help us to shine light on and address the sin in our lives and in our community.

We know that our sin hurts our relationship with you and with others. We ask for you to guide us in this time and help us to heal. Lord, please help us to seek your will in our lives and in our relationships.

In Jesus name,

Amen

Read the text for today. (Suggestion: Go around and read it out loud, each person taking a verse.)

Ask: What stood out to you about this text? What, if anything, doesn't make sense? What caught your attention and sparked curiosity?

It was the year King Uzziah died; it was a bad time, a shaky time, a frightening time. And not just for the people of Israel, but for the prophet Isaiah as well. Suddenly Isaiah had his vision drawn to heaven. King Uzziah represented normal, everyday life in this world. It all seemed large and important until he saw God high and lifted up, and suddenly Isaiah found all of his thoughts and priorities re-aligned.

Suddenly he felt unworthy and unclean. When Isaiah looked around at his society, in the light that was streaming from God's throne, he knew that he and the rest of the world were unclean, messed up, cheap, and sinful. So Isaiah confessed his sin. He cried out the truth of his condition. And God forgave him. Rather than take away Isaiah's life, God took away his guilt.

God cleansed Isaiah with fire and gave him a job to do. It was not an easy assignment. Isaiah had to tell the people of Israel that they were done for, and God predicted that they wouldn't listen. Israel wouldn't listen because they refused to have their lives weighed on the same scale as God's majesty. They refused to let themselves be made to feel small and lowly.

The Triune God is not someone to be viewed casually. When people encounter God through worship they are often moved to awe-inspired silence and humility. Included in many liturgies for worship is time for Confession and Assurance. We don't do it to induce guilt. We don't do it because it's something we've always done. It's also not something we should drop if a survey revealed that people find it to be a downer that gets in the way of the kind of worship they prefer.

We take time to confess because it offers us a glimpse of the true God of all holiness, and then we look back at our lives in that light. We see things that are wrong and out-of-sync. It's like someone asking, "Can you see the coffee I spilled on my pants?" Sometimes to give an accurate answer you have to say, "I can't tell—step over here into the light so I can see better." In the light the coffee stain you couldn't see before shows up. The same is true here: once you step into the light, things show up that no one noticed before.

In Isaiah 6 it was the year King Uzziah died, but once Isaiah sees God on the throne, you don't hear about Uzziah again! New things have come to light, new needs have been discovered, and new priorities set. That is part of what worship should do for us. We don't come to worship just to have our so-called "needs" met, but also to *find out* just what our needs really are! We don't come to simply acknowledge a

friendship with the God we want, but to encounter the true God in ways that make us into the kind of people *God* wants us to be!

Our weekly time of confession is a way to acknowledge that we are not always as good as we should be. It also provides an opportunity for us to acknowledge the difference between God and us in ways that help us to aspire to live in God's light. Our society is pretty good at making us feel unsatisfied. The entire advertising industry *depends* on its ability to make us feel inadequate and needy. We don't seem to mind having advertisers bombard us with reminders that we need to upgrade our lives. Oddly, in recent years some people have resisted church services which include calls to confess our sins and to be transformed by God. However, as long as we live on this side of the new creation, we cannot encounter God without some sense of Isaiah's "Woe is me!" coming over us.

This isn't the *only* feeling we experience in worship—it may not be the dominant feeling, or the one that lingers when we go home. But if it is missing completely, then we could legitimately wonder just which God is being encountered in worship: the one Isaiah saw, high and lifted up? Or the one we have created for ourselves, low and manageable within the scope of our lives on this earth?

Let's talk about it:

- What are your reservations about confession?
- Who do you have in your life with whom you can practice confession? Someone to help keep you accountable?
- Can you say it? – "I was wrong" or "I messed up" and have it mean that you change something in your life?
- How can confession be something regular in your life? Is there a way to make it a regular fixture? It probably won't be easy to do...but it's necessary.
- Isaiah recognizes that he's a sinful person, but because his lips are made clean by God's action, his sins are atoned for. How would Isaiah's experience provide hope for God's people in light of their desperate situation described in the first few chapters?

Closing prayer:

Merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you  
with our whole heart and mind and strength.  
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
In your mercy forgive what we have been,  
help us amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we may delight in your will  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your holy name.  
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.