

Epiphany 5: February 6/7, 2010

20/20

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

How are you at number recognition? If I would say the following, what would they mean?

- 10:4: Affirmative , Ok, Understood
- 1040: Tax time!
- 401k: In this economy it means “The hurrier I go the behinder I get!”
- Here’s a trick number: 44/56/4. Super Bowl 44 will score 56 points between the Colts and the Saints, with the Colts being 4 point favorites.
- 20/20: Normal vision, meaning when you stand 20 feet from an eye chart you can see what a “normal” person would see from that distance. You are legally blind if your vision is 20/200.

So how well do you see? You can answer that in two ways. We can talk about our eyesight and our need for corrective lenses or lasik surgery. We can also talk about our mindsight and our lack of ability to comprehend the big picture. For instance, what do you see in the projected graphic? [*show “tree and forest”*]. Certainly a big tree. A great big tree. Front and center. Reaching to the sky. Massive in weight and dominating in presence. See anything else? There happens to be a forest around it. But you have to look past the obvious to see “big picture”. How many of you couldn’t “see the forest for the trees”? That’s called lack of vision, too, like a 20/200 person. Unfortunately, it is far more prevalent than legal blindness. And it cripples us from distinguishing the important from the urgent, life priorities from momentary passions. We need a vision that will lift our spirits and order our lives. [*Return to title slide*] Like the one given Isaiah...

The reading from Isaiah today begins, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord...” It is the vision of Isaiah in which he is taken into the throne room of God. It came to him in the year Uzziah died. A time of potential upheaval and civil war. His long and prosperous reign was ended. Who could follow and continue the prosperity? Many unknowns. Much uncertainty. Perhaps similar to our own during tumultuous economic times with an election looming this fall. But with one notable exception: there was no clear cut order of succession. Into a tumultuous time such as this the Lord revealed himself to Isaiah in a vision.

And, oh, what a vision it was! Can we fully appreciate it, sensing it with ears that have only heard the account read, with eyes that have only seen it printed on the page? To behold the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, with expansive flowing robes. Attended by six-winged seraphim. Lauded "holy, holy, holy" by their unison cry. Doorposts trembling and threshold shaking. The pungent smell of smoke filling the temple, casting an awesome cloud over all. Take off your sandals, Isaiah, for the place where you are standing is holy ground!

You may be in wonder at this vision. You may even long to have been there yourself. I doubt you would care to feel the raw edge of terror that Isaiah felt. Never forget that our God is a holy God; he is the Holy One of Israel. “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11) God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Subjected to the searing light of God’s presence, Isaiah saw his own darkness. What are the first words that escape his lips? *Woe to me! I am ruined!*

Tell me what you see in the projected circles. [*Show color blindness test 1*] I am color blind, as is about 12-20% of the men (but only a tiny fraction of women). Most of these circles are nothing but spots to me. I can see “25” in the upper left circle, and a faint “56” in the middle right circle. That’s it. I’m told

that most of you can see “25, 45, 6” in the left column, and “29, 56, 8” in the right. I’ll just have to take your word for it. The second test is equally revealing. *[Show color blindness test 2]* For the majority of you, you see a “5” in the dot pattern. Beats me where it is. For red/green color blind individuals, we see a “2”. Can you see the “2”? The point is: When you can’t see the pattern, you simply can’t see it. No matter how hard you try. It’s not there. *[Return to title slide]* A bit like human righteousness. There is self righteousness, by which we attempt to justify our actions based upon standards we construct. There is civil righteousness by which we conform to the laws of the land and even participate in humanitarian causes. And there is God’s righteousness which is a reflection of his holiness. Human righteousness may faintly reveal the pattern in the circle, but it is distorted at best. And for the most part we are oblivious to the pattern of God’s righteousness, it simply cannot be discerned. Why? *Because it is revealed by the Spirit to those who are being saved.* What does the Spirit reveal? He reveals “Woe to me, I am ruined.” Our righteousness is like a soiled garment that reeks of foul thoughts and hidden sins. We know this reek. The Spirit reveals what we are by nature. We can no more ascend to God and mirror his righteousness than I can see those blasted numbers in the circles.

The Spirit would reveal more, lest we despair of all hope. Isaiah stood in the presence of God and awaited his doom. Miraculously, it didn’t come. The consuming fire of God’s wrath was replaced by the cleansing fire of a live coal taken from God’s altar. “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” The consuming fire becomes the cleansing fire. *He shall purify the sons of Levi.* The Spirit reveals Jesus in whom is both righteousness and purity. For he is the spotless lamb of God, righteous and holy. But the Spirit reveals more. What is God’s prevailing nature? Many think it to be justice, and devote their lives trying to satisfy him. Gaze into the vision of Isaiah and know the folly of such attempt. The Spirit reveals God’s greater nature which is his compassion. *He delights in showing mercy.* So with the eyes of faith we see the spotless Lamb of God soiled by sin—our sin. We see the fire of God’s judgment ruining and consuming this perfect sacrifice. And we see our guilt taken away and our sin atoned for. The Spirit reveals Jesus, who comes to save his people from their sins. The cleansing Pentecost fire descends upon the disciples and they testify boldly to all that they have seen and heard. That fire descends upon us in the cleansing flood of baptism and we are changed. *Reborn,* Jesus tells Nicodemus. *Of water and the Spirit.* Confessing our sins, we trust in God’s atoning sacrifice which we see in the face of Jesus.

Can one remain unchanged after a vision of God such as this? It is not possible. Having seen the face of God, having received his gracious forgiveness, having experienced new life: How then shall we live? *[Show the raising of Lazarus]* One can only imagine how changed life was for Lazarus after Jesus commanded him to *come forth* from the grave. He looks a bit dazed and confused in this painting. Not to worry: Jesus leans forward to grasp his friend’s hand and pull him to his feet. Perhaps he whispers into Lazarus’ ear what God openly inquires of Isaiah: *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* Isaiah was changed. Lazarus experienced that resurrection change. We know that change as well as we see God’s grace in the face of Jesus, and as we touch eternity in bread and wine which are his body and blood. *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* *[Return to title slide]*

Here am I. Send me. We are a 21st Century Mission and Discipleship Center. We go. We invite. We respond. We testify. To what we have seen and heard. The love of Christ compels us. “Here am I” produced a \$9,357 response last weekend alone for Haiti relief. *[Show four Haiti slides in three second intervals]* Funds which go to LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Which lend a healing touch and a gracious word to a nation that cries out, “Woe to us, we are ruined!” They are not ruined. Not as long as the Spirit of God goes out to seek and to save the lost. *[Return to title slide]* Just as he has done for you. Given you new vision. 20/20 eyesight. To see God and to live. To trust God and to go. And so today we confirm that resolve and pledge with Isaiah: *Here am I. Send me.* Amen