

Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

For you students, I'll bet there were times in the last nine months, where any, or all of you, felt an awful like our reading from Isaiah this morning. Verse 6 reads: "Then one of the seraphs [an angel] flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs, and with that a live coal touched my lips." I am guessing that at some times the class was close to torture, having that live coal touch your lips. But I also hope that at other times, and I'll say hopefully most of the time, our time together was at least interesting, if not even enjoyable. But seeing your faces, it doesn't look like it.

Maybe you guys remember that back in September, which was the first time that we gathered together, there were you and someone from your family, probably your parents. At that time we reminded everyone why you guys were doing this to begin with. We were doing it because sometime in your life, either your parents, grandparents, an aunt or uncle, or someone close to you, made some promises on your behalf. Most of you were an infant when you were baptised, although not everyone, and those promises were made for you because for the most part you couldn't make them for yourself. They were asked something like this:

*As you bring this child to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with these responsibilities: to live with this child among God's faithful people, and to bring them to the word of God and the holy supper. To teach this child the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Commandments and to place in their hands the holy scriptures. To nurture them in faith and prayer, so that your child may learn to trust God. To proclaim Christ through word and deed. To care for others and the world God made and to work for justice and peace. Do you promise to help this child fulfill these promises?*

Somebody on your behalf said Yes.

That's a whole lot of things to promise on your behalf, and things that we tried to touch on these last nine months—whether you knew it or not. We tried to put a lot of that into action, by having you do the service hours; by asking you to read the Gospel of Luke; when we had the discussions about the creed and the Trinity. In the process you may have had some questions that were raised. Some of you were even bold enough to ask those questions in class. Kind of like Nicodemus did in the gospel reading this morning.

In the gospel reading, Jesus had been doing some public teaching and Nicodemus had some questions about what Jesus was saying. But like many students, Nicodemus didn't raise his hand in class because he didn't want to appear stupid in front of everybody else. So, he waited until after class and he found the teacher. He went over and he asked, 'Can you explain this to me? I don't really understand the stuff you were talking about.' So Jesus, being a good teacher, went ahead and explained to Nicodemus the answer. Which in turn, causes Nicodemus to ask some more questions, and leaves pretty much more confused than when he started with. Hopefully,

you guys are not in that same position. But the very fact that Nicodemus asked those questions, and ended up having more questions, gives me hope for all the times when I keep coming up with questions about faith.

I want to get back to that whole “live coal” thing. Because, even though I hope our time together the last nine months was a good and growing time for all of you, I don’t want you to leave with that image of the live coal being a bad thing. Remember, the seraph picked up the live coal, brought it over to Isaiah, and then in verse 7, “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” That is one of the things that today is all about. It is about being reminded that our sins are “blotted out.” They are burned away. They are turned to ash.

That happened, first, a long time ago, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside of some provincial little backwater burg of the Roman Empire. It was in a place that was so insignificant that politicians were often sent there just to get them out of the way. But it was there, in this barely wide spot in a Roman road, that the most significant, life altering, amazing, event took place. It was there that God the creator, God the redeemer, God the Son, was killed. He was humiliated, beaten, stripped naked and hung on a cross. The reason that happened was because of every single, solitary, lousy, awful, mean, unspeakable, and atrocious thing that I have ever done. Plus, everything that I am currently doing, and ever will do.

God didn’t do that just for me. God also did that for Emily, Miriam, Erika, Benjamin, Leah, Morgan, Alex, Shane, Ryan, Kyle, Ashley, Matt, Kate, Elizabeth, Rachel, Sullivan, Jake, Liz, and Tyler. God did this for each and every one of you. It started on that cross, and it continues when you, yourself, were baptized; however long or short time ago that was. And today, we are being reminded of that love, grace, and forgiveness that happened because of Jesus’ death on the cross. We are reminded not just today, on the day that you get to wear those cool looking robes, but every time we gather together for worship. Not just here at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2000 Chestnut St., Camp Hill, PA Not just here, but wherever and whenever you gather for worship, which hopefully, you will continue to do. Either here or somewhere else. Hopefully you will continue to do that on a regular and frequent basis for the rest of your life. Some of you may not; some of you may stop for a while and then start up again, but some Good News. We are not alone in this walk of faith.

In order to explain that, I need to ask you folks of the congregation a question: Everybody who is here today because there is a student being confirmed, will you stand up for a moment? Students, you need to see this; will you stand up and turn and look at them? This is about a good third of the people present because of you students. Those who did not come because of a student, but are here to worship, will you raise your hand? O.K., thank you. Students, you may sit down. Did you see all of those people out there? They are here, whether they know it or not, to help you guys. To help us together to live out this life of faith. We are not alone. We do this life of faith as a group. Just as we have for the last nine months, Sunday mornings at 9:30, Room 236. Jesus had the twelve, the twelve had the other eleven, you have got all of these folks and even more. Even more than just the folks who are gathered here in Fellowship Hall at 11:30 on June 7, 2009.

We have more than just these folks to help us remember that because of love, grace and forgiveness. Today, you students are taking those promises made at your baptism onto yourself. We are reminded of those promises every time we gather for worship, every time we gather to

celebrate the Meal, the Lord's Supper. We are reminded that we are not alone in our walk of faith.

We are reminded, filled, and connected, one to another. We are connected because of baptism; we are connected because of the bread and wine. We are connected to all the people here, as well as those across the Gathering Space at 11:00 worship, as well as the folks who gathered together at 8:15 this morning. We are connected to those who worship on Saturday evening (did you know we have a Saturday night worship?). We are also connected to those people gathering down the road at St. Timothy Lutheran, and across the tracks over at Grace Lutheran, Highland Park. But even more, we are connected to those folks who are gathering at Camp Hill Presbyterian, and at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox, and those at Mt. Calvary Episcopal, and the folks at Christian Life Assembly, and even people down the road at Good Shepherd Roman Catholic Church.

More than that, as we are gathered together because of our baptism and communion, we are joined with all the believers in PA, and throughout all of the World. Even more than that, throughout time. All believers of every time and place are gathered together through baptism and bread and wine. So you are not alone. We are reminded of this life altering event that happened, every single day of our lives. So you eighteen people, and all the rest of us as well, are called to go forth, reminding the world of God's love, grace, and forgiveness.

It won't always be an easy task. We can ask Isaiah. He had a rough time of it. Check with Nicodemus. Being a believer in a non-believing world is not a walk in the park. But we are reminded, today especially, that God is with us always. That we have one another. The good times like today, when we rejoice that this year long process has come to an end; and the times like today, when we suffer along with Jacob Trump and his family over the death of his sister.

So go forth today strengthened, filled and affirmed.

Amen.