



Monday

Isaiah 6:1-5

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” ⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

The prophet Isaiah had it right. In his vision he saw himself in the literal presence of the Most High and he was *terrified*. Why? Because he knew himself to be “a man of unclean lips” and living among “a people of unclean lips.” In other words, he was an unholy person, sitting in the presence of a holy God. We don’t often appreciate the difference between us and the Most High. We certainly are aware that God is other, but when we use language of “children of God” and God as Father or Divine Mother, we can easily be lulled into believing that God isn’t so much different from us. That’s not true. God is holy. Holy means sacred, separate, apart. The Orthodox Church does a good job remembering this. If you have ever been to an Orthodox service you will note how mystical it is. Incense and chanting and all sorts of postures that remind us of God’s holiness are ever-present. I was once asked why we do a confession of sins at the beginning of worship. In answer, I quoted one of my teachers: “We confess sin when we come into God’s presence because God is holy and we are not.” A good reminder.

Prayer

We praise you, O God, for your holiness. We praise you that you are greater than us in every regard – in holiness, in wisdom, in love, and in power. We stand in awe of your glory. Grant us grace to live our lives in holy awe of you, even as we bask in your love, amazed that you call us children of God. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Genesis 18:1-2, 9-15

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

This is one of the most delightful stories in Scripture. Abraham and Sarah have already been promised offspring and as a result have been re-named: Abram to Abraham, and Sarai to Sarah. This visit by the Lord confirms this promise: Sarah will conceive and bear a child. What is their response? We aren't told what Abraham's response is. I imagine a rolling of the eyes, a dropping of the jaw, a silent chuckle. Sarah's response is caught on film: she laughed. She denies it, but we have the video, says the Lord. Laughing at the ridiculous notions of God is certainly something we are all capable of. I remember a couple who went childless for years, though they tried *everything*. Just when they had made all the arrangements for an adoption, and in fact, the baby was soon to be theirs, they found out they were pregnant. Surprise! Now they had two! I don't believe God is ever put off by our laughing at God's plans. After all, as St. Paul says, God "is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." So the next time you encounter one of God's promises, or one of God's miracles, have a good laugh. God will laugh with you.

Prayer

God of All Life, we thank and praise you for your miraculous and mysterious ways. Sometimes you bless us in ways we couldn't have even imagined. Sometimes you provide for us with abundance that is extravagant. Sometimes you heal us from deadly diseases from which none thought we could recover. We praise you for your miracles. Give us faith to trust you ever. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Luke 14:12-14

¹² [Jesus] said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Lest we misconstrue Jesus’ words here, be assured that Jesus is not commanding us to quit partying with our friends and family. Far from it. What Jesus is reminding us here is our call to hospitality, especially for those who might never be invited to or sit down at a fine meal. I remember when my wife and I were brand new to the student housing at seminary. It was summer and the day we moved into our apartment was a hot one. My wife was 6 months pregnant. As we were schlepping the umpteenth box up the stairs to our apartment, a woman who lived on the first floor brought out an ice cold pitcher of fresh lemonade and some cookies. She offered these to us in all of our sweatiness. It was an act of genuine welcome and hospitality that we remember to this day. She did not do it so that she could be repaid, or in order to gain some advantage; it was an act of true hospitality. This is what Jesus calls us to: simple words and acts of welcome and generosity to those who are in any need. The world needs this now more than ever.

Prayer

Gracious God, as you have been generous to us, grant that we might be generous with others. As you have looked on our poverty and blessed us, let us look upon the needs of others and be a blessing to them. Use us to bring joy and peace, mercy and compassion, to the world. We are your servants. We are blessed to be a blessing. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Acts 9:26-31

²⁶ When [Saul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. ³¹ Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and

Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

This story comes right on the heels of St. Paul's vision of Christ on the road to Damascus and his subsequent conversion and baptism. Prior to this, he was known as Saul, and as a faithful Pharisee, was determined to stomp out this new movement that had sprung up in the aftermath of Jesus' resurrection. In fact, he was so zealous to destroy the Jesus movement that he was even inspiring others to murder the followers of Christ if necessary. This explains why the disciples in Jerusalem were so reluctant to embrace him when he showed up at their door. They probably thought that this was merely a ploy to draw them out and identify them so he could haul them off to prison, or worse. But Barnabas comes to his aid, telling the believers in Jerusalem that Saul's conversion to the Jesus Way was authentic and they had nothing to fear. Have you ever had someone vouch for you in a tough situation? I have. It's a great gift. That person says, "Don't worry. He's with me. She's with me. I can vouch for them." That's actually what the name Barnabas means. *Bar* is the Hebrew word for son, and *nabas* means encouragement. So Barnabas means "a son of encouragement." And if we substitute the Hebrew word for daughter, *Bat*, we get Batnabas, "a daughter of encouragement." We can all be sons and daughters of encouragement, giving a defense to those who are under attack, and bringing peace to our divided world.

Prayer

Mold us into sons and daughters of encouragement, O God. Give us eyes to see those who need our support. Give us hearts that are open to the needs around us. Give us courage to follow in the way of Jesus, offering love and encouragement, strength and support, to all we encounter. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Ezekiel 1:15-21

¹⁵ As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. ¹⁶ As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl; and the four had the same form, their construction being something like a wheel within a wheel. ¹⁷ When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved. ¹⁸ Their rims were tall and awesome, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. ¹⁹ When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. ²⁰ Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. ²¹ When they moved, the others moved; when they stopped, the others stopped; and when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

When I was a kid I remember singing the African American spiritual, “Ezekiel saw the Wheel.” That was a song about this mind-blowing vision of Ezekiel. The refrain goes like this: “Ezekiel saw the wheel, way up in the middle of the air. Ezekiel saw the wheel, way in the middle of the air. And the little wheel run by faith, and the big wheel run by the grace of God. A wheel in a wheel, way up in the middle of the air.” The song is one that warns against hypocrisy and a lack of attention to the coming Day of the Lord. In the final verse, the singer proclaims, “One of these days about twelve o’clock, way in the middle of the air, This old world’s gonna reel and rock, way in the middle of the air.” I think that the song writers had it right: these fearsome images of God that include living creatures with eyes everywhere and spirits and wheels are given to us to remind us that a day is coming when this old earth will be gone and a new heaven and a new earth will be created by God. The new heaven and earth will be glorious, we are told, but they will be nothing we can imagine – way beyond our imagination, in fact. So we do well to remember the words of the song writer and live our lives with a due sense of responsibility as we joyfully await the coming Day of the Lord.

Prayer

We are your people, Holy God. You have called us to lives of faith and love. You have also called us to lives of integrity and truth-seeking. Grant that each day we might live with a due sense of responsibility, being true to our calling, and spreading your compassion and love to all we encounter. In Jesus’ name we pray. AMEN.