

Awe prompts action. A sermon preached on
September 17, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian
Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Texts; ISAIAH 6:1-8

II TIMOTHY 3:16

Some go to church to take a walk
Some go there to laugh and talk
Some go there to meet a friend
Some go there their time to spend
Some go there to meet a lover,
Some go there a fault to cover.
Some go there for speculation
Some go there for observation
Some go there to doze and nod
The wise go there to worship God.

The authorship of that little rhyme is credited to
many,

And some versions are longer and more pointed,
But you get the drift

There is nothing inherently wrong with most
of what is said – though meeting a lover or covering
a fault might lead to “problems”

But if these are the ONLY reasons to attend church,
then there are some issues.

The world in which we live,

The dominant culture which bombards us stridently with things that are anything but the way Jesus would have his followers live

Continues to try and undermine the presence and purposes of God.

Continues to try to prevent us from recognize how near God really is to each of us and in our lives.

I loved Richard Topping's comment about today's standard greeting between two people – How are you today? I am busy!

This is a busy world in which we live.

It is so easy to cave into, buy into the mantra of Alice in Wonderland's White Rabbit – great pocket watch held out

I'm late, I'm late

For a very important date

No time to say hello, good bye. I'm late, I'm late, I'm late.

The noise, busyness and hurry are all about us.

One of many results of this is that those who make it to church enter feeling like hamsters on a little wheel

Rather than coming into worship with a sense of anticipation about who God is, a sense expectation

What God has done and is doing

And will do in our lives

Busyness can effectively cloud out that sense of being amazed that the transcendent Creator of

the universe would want to dwell among those he created.

Therefore when we participate in worship we are never merely 'singing songs'.

We are proclaiming and meditating on life-transforming realities that God uses to change our perspective

Fill us with fresh faith and open our eyes to immeasurable power.

We are no less joining with the myriads and saints and angels around the throne of God who unceasingly praise him.

When we participate in worship we are never merely 'hearing a sermon'

For the sermon is not about the preacher – through the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, God is present and working in our hearts

When we participate in worship we are never "merely meeting each other" – we are meeting with God in the presence of God at HIS invitation

To celebrate the gospel,

To enjoy the miracle of being his adopted sons and daughters through Jesus Christ.

Remember Jesus' words to his disciples – **you did not choose me, but I chose you.**

But all of this can get derailed so easily⁷

How? Certainly busyness in our lives that overwhelms our lives

The tyranny of the immediate can derail worship,

As can hurry and noise.

The default position of the world – it's all about me and what I can get out of life – also derails worship.

As does a loss of awe, the mysterious the holy of God

Our use of the word awesome to describe anything from a new video game to a well plated dinner has cheapened or dumbed down that particular aspect of God.

Whenever we speak, worship, pray – we must never forget that God is full of awe – awefull if you wish to use that word...

What I want us to spend time doing for the next few weeks is to lift up what we do here Sunday by Sunday – WORSHIP – with a view of identifying some corrective behavior that I believe ensures that worship *never becomes mere entertainment*

Or happy clappy or folksy in the worse sense of those words

God must remain both subject and object of our worship

For how we worship both reveals and forms our identity as persons and communities.

This morning, *we must never lose the aspect of mystery and awe whenever we speak of or worship God*
 God is so much bigger than we are,
 More powerful than any worldly army

Government or particular leader.

As most of you know I love watching
Movies.

One of my favorite genres of film is escapist
Adventure – car chases, good and evil clearly
Defined.

Some degree of resolution – if not complete, then at
Least resolved in an affirmative way.

One of my all-time favorites is Stephen Spielberg's
Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark.

Indiana Jones is a professor of archeology, but also a
Treasure hunter

He's played in the movie by actor Harrison Ford.

The storyline concerns the searching for and
Eventual discovery of the lost Ark of the Covenant.
--the repository of Moses staff, some manna from
Desert and the 10 commandments – the Exodus
Story.

Indiana goes to search for the Ark for research and
Study purposes.

Evil and godless Nazis want the Ark for the power
Of God said to go with it.

The story is really about who can hold onto the
Ark the longest – Indiana or the Nazis

Spielberg is a master director and his Jewish
upbringing resonates throughout the film.

The Lord is indeed holy, mysterious, powerful and
not to be toyed with

Near the end of the move – the clip I am
 going to play
 The Nazis now have the Ark
 To ensure it is the real deal – they are going to open
 it,
 Before they send it to Berlin
 If you remember an incident from the book of
 Samuel,
 A servant of David's dies just touching the Ark.
 It is not going to go well with those who propose to
 open the Ark!!
 When I first saw this scene I was blown
 away
 It is the best portrayal of a God who is not to be
 toyed with or taken lightly
 An awesome and holy God
 A God whose power knows no boundaries
 Now, I want to warn you these are not gentle
 scenes.
 The angels we will see are not Christmas card sweet
 cupie dolls
 They are there protecting and affirming God's
 holiness
 The Nazis have clearly crossed the line in terms of
 God's holiness, God's commands and God
 shall not be silent or passive.
Show clip 1:44:07-1:49:00
 The God who is capable of this – the God of wrath,
 terror and punishment

Remember is also the God of the Psalmist – **the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want**
 Also God speaking through the prophet Isaiah
**“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
 and have no compassion on the child she has
 borne?
 Though she may forget,
 I will not forget you!**
¹⁶ **See, I have engraved you on the palms of my
 hands;
 your walls are ever before me.**

God is not just our “good buddy”
 He is not some indifferent and dodder old guy who
 lives somewhere up there
*Good worship, proper worship helps us to hold in balance
 the wrathful God*
And the loving Creator – for GOD IS BOTH.
 Good worship helps us to retain awe and reverence
 about God
 Without making God a source only of terror.
 Good worship ensures that our worship of God is
 never flippant.

Today,
 I believe one of the great temptations for those who
 both lead and participate in worship is that in
 the attempt to be more inclusive
 More user friendly and relevant,
 This sense of *God’s greatness, fullness and mystery is
 often missing.*

Spielberg's Raiders of the Lost Ark and scriptures
 like the one Joan read from the early chapters
 of the book of Isaiah,

I believe can help us remember God is so much
 bigger,

More powerful,

More awesome than we are or can ever be!!

Look at that Isaiah passage.

It is Isaiah's vision of the Lord high and lifted up

It is a vision with a specific time and place – **the
 year that King Uzziah died.**

It is a grand vision is it not.

An awesome and glorious vision

The Lord sitting on a throne

The hem of his robe filling the temple.

Numerous seraphim flying about.

Their feet and the eyes covered by their wings – a
 sign of respect and being in the presence of
 the Holy.

Smoke fills the temple – presence of God

Now, we may not be to duplicate or copy the
 vision in our own lives –

Nor ought we to expect to – for this is Isaiah's
 vision.

Yet there are elements of this vision that must be
 present in worship,

Less our worship over time become banal or trite.

*The worship of God is always an opportunity to enter
into,*

Be reminded that we live in a world that is richer,

More awesome,

More mysterious than the here and now

Worship,

Wherever it is, is ALWAYS ABOUT GOD, NOT
US?

The people of Israel spoke a lot about the Shekinah
(God's personal presence)

The glory of the Lord in a place.

That glory is here in this place – do you
know that

Do you realize that?

No – really – YEP

I have had too many people over the 12 years I have
served you here say to me that God is very
present here

The Holy

And they go on to tell me, saying their words are
inadequate

How they know this to be the case.

That is another cause to give thanks to God for his
lavish provision.

For that presence of God happens when and only
when we cultivate and eagerly seek to
worship him.

God honours true worship – always has
Word of caution and counsel.

Never be arrogant about this

For God can remove his presence, when true
worship is not practiced.

And you do not ever want to be in that position – it
is truly debilitating!!!

*The worship of God is also always an opportunity to
come before him, JUST AS WE ARE – frail,
imperfect, perhaps even like Isaiah – a **person of
unclean lips.***

And we definitely live in a world of unclean lips.
Intentional and purposeful worship of God always
confronts us with not only a holy God
But also our unworthiness.

Isaiah's **Woe is me, I am lost** is a common feeling
when we realize and admit how far we have
fallen from the glory of God

In worship that sense of human frailty, sin, and
unworthiness may strike us in a prayer of
confession,

A hymn,

A sermon,

Or just being in God's presence

We need that sense – all of us do – not so we can
wallow nor have a pity party

Or confirm that we are miserable worms

Rather, to counter strident and beguiling voices that
says, or tells us

WE could never be wrong

It is someone else's fault

We are not be blame for (...whatever the for is
The human drive for self-deception and
rationalization remains strong.

Worship of God counters that in the end destructive
drive.

*Worship of God then too reminds us that even in our
uncleanness, before a holy God,
God still reaches out to us.*

We are not meant to feel abandoned, twisting
helplessly in the wind,

Cast aside or unimportant to God.

Everyone, imperfect as they are is precious in
God's sight.

In the Isaiah reading, one of the seraphs touches
Isaiah's tongue with a live coal from the altar,
With the words, **Now that this has touched your
lips, your guilt has departed, and your sin is
blotted out.**

That's about the *FORGIVENESS OF GOD*.

I do not for a moment believe the touch of the live
coal to Isaiah's tongue was painless.

It was painful.

Forgiveness by God means we have to examine our
own lives and that can be incredibly painful.

Change can be painful

Discarding habits and actions that are sinful and
destructive is rarely easy

Healing memories and old hurts is painful
 Accepting and offering forgiveness can be
 incredibly painful.

Yet, as the vision of Isaiah 6 shows – *it is God's action
 first that forgives.*

The degree to which we can see and appropriate in
 our lives God's forgiveness of us,
 To that same degree we can forgive others.

*Worship of God is a beginning point. Our service to God
 does not end with the time of formal or informal worship.*
 I had a colleague years ago who used to close every
 service of worship with what I thought to be a very
 trite benediction

He'd raise his hands and proclaim-- THE
 WORSHIP IS OVER, THE SERVICE BEGINS"

I used to wince every time I heard him do this
 I still think as a benediction it is trite and somewhat
 misdirected

Worship needs to end on a note of empowerment
 by God – God's grace, mercy and peace going with
 us now and forever....

However the passage from Isaiah does remind us
 that worship,

Seeing the Lord high and lifted up,
 Being touched by the forgiveness of God is not the
 end.

To the Lord's ongoing and ever current question
Whom shall I send and who will go for us (vs. 8)

There can only be one answer – **Here am I, send me**
Send me back into this very needy of God
world.

Send me back to the family, the community, the
hospital room, the committee meeting, the
classroom, the office, the laboratory and lecture hall,
The locker room, the gathering place, the care
home, the appointments and commitments of this
week

For I have been once again been reminded
that life is more than what is in it for me.

More than consumerism

More than being #1

More than looking good at all costs.

I have been reminded that the mysterious exists

As do the thin places where God is especially close

I have been reminded that God is in charge,

And we are in his hands

His promises will be fulfilled in his time

And that those promises have incredible leverage

AMEN