

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE (Dual-parish service with Immanuel)

Advent I – Midweek

December 6, 2017

Text: Isaiah 6:1–7; I John 3:4–10

Pictures of Redemption – Sin

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“A picture is worth a thousand words” is the old saying. Tonight, I need a thousand words or so to paint a picture. For the next few moments, let's ramp up our imagination and, with the help of a thousand words or so, see a picture of our redemption from sin.

The picture of redemption painted in the Bible is rich with many shades of meaning and various layers of depth. In general, however, the picture of Biblical redemption is one of recovery, fulfillment, or satisfaction. For example, property can be redeemed, that is recovered when lost, through means sanctioned by God. Or contracts are satisfied when all the conditions are met and consummated with an act of redemption. Or religious ceremonies are fulfilled such as when the Jewish firstborn sons were redeemed via blood sacrifice. All of these acts of redemption are powerful and wonderful.

But the most picturesque acts of redemption in the Bible are those in which a person's life was forfeit – under a death sentence because of some iniquitous act of sin – and was brought back from death because of an act of redemption, an act of salvation.

Imagine Isaiah's situation in tonight's first reading. Isaiah is a prophet of God; they are known for having visions. Well, he has one, of God Himself, “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.” Picture that! As if that weren't sufficiently overwhelming, Isaiah also sees fiery angels, seraphim they are called. They have six wings. With 2 they cover their faces and with 2 they cover their feet. For they dwell in God's direct presence; the holiest of holies. With two wings, they fly when commissioned by God to fulfill His will. And they sing the “trisagion”: “holy, holy, holy is the Lord of host; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Sound awesome? God, temple, throne, angels, solemn worship, divine majesty and glory, etc. Is your imagination on overload? It should be. Have you ever thought you'd like to see God and experience His immediate, direct presence? I know I have.

As Christians, we all long to see God. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God taught Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

But there's a huge problem for Isaiah. He is a sinner. The Bible also says that all of us are sinners; from the moment of conception, sinner. Isaiah's problem is our problem.

Sin is defined in the Bible as lawlessness (I Jn. 3:4); without law, without order, without authority. Sin creates chaotic disorder; it defiles and corrupts all that it touches. It acknowledges no authority except its own. That means we sinners are inclined to lawlessness, disorder, rebellion, corruption, and chaos. Sinners in the presence of God forfeit their lives; sinners are under a sentence of death and judgment in God's holy presence. That's the picture we must have in mind. The sinner will die in God's presence.

Listen to and imagine Isaiah's horror as he experiences God's direct, immediate presence, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Lost, undone, unclean, under the prophetic judgment of woe because sinful lips and corrupted eyes have seen God, the Lord of hosts!

Have we not lost a true sense of the horror at what sin is and what it has done and continues to do to us human beings? Because of our sins, our lives are forfeit. There is only eternal judgment and condemnation in store for us sinners. Sadly, one of sin's effects is to desensitize us to our mortal danger. It's time to see our condition and awaken from our slumbers.

The apostle John wrote, "No one who abides in (God) keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen (God) or known him...Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning...No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God" (I Jn. 3:6, 8, 9). Sin and God are incompatible. Sin and the devil are two peas in a pod. We must know, we must imagine and see the devastation sin is. Without it, we cannot see a proper picture of redemption from sin.

And that's the point of this sermon! Redemption from sin; God's saving action for us sinners whose life is forfeit because of our sin. Imagine Isaiah's relief and everlasting joy at God's redemptive act performed on Isaiah's behalf. Imagine this: "Then one of

the seraphim (one of those fiery angels!) flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth (with the burning coal!) and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips (those unclean, sinful lips); your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’” Imagine your lips being touched by a fiery angel with holy fire from God’s holy altar. The sin that corrupted Isaiah’s lips was no minor smudge wiped away with a napkin.

Imagine this! Jesus, God’s eternal Son becomes incarnate of the Virgin Mary. He is born and raised in absolute obscurity until the time appointed by His Heavenly Father arrives. After three years of ministry healing the sick and oppressed and proclaiming liberty to men and women trapped in sin, this God-man, sinless, pure, and perfect, willingly goes in love to Golgotha to be crucified unto death in order to touch our unclean lips and impure eyes. He atones for our sin, not with fire from His Father’s heavenly altar, but with His divine, holy blood. He rises from the dead on the third day so that the sting of sin, death, is made impotent, powerless, harmless, and futile. Picture that act of redemption! Because Jesus touches you with His holy, precious blood, your sin is removed forever. You are redeemed from sin. Redeemed from its chaos, its disorder, its rebellion, its fruits of judgment and death. Resurrection life is given to us sinners instead!

But understand this, dear redeemed saints of God, we do not have to only picture this redemption. We also experience it. During our Sunday divine service, we sing the Sanctus, the “holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, heav’n and earth are fully of Thy glory...”, just a few moments before we enter into the holy of holies to receive Christ’s body and blood. During every communion service, Christ’s once-for-all perfect act of redemption touches our lips. We should not picture an angel touching our lips, like Isaiah of old, but Christ Himself. The apostle John declares, “You know that (Jesus) appeared in order to take away sins...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil...Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he (Jesus) righteous” (I Jn. 5, 8b, 7b).

And we should hear by faith what Isaiah heard, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” Do we not confess in the Small Catechism, “These words, ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,’ show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” We need not fear entering into God’s presence. Instead of death, disorder, chaos and

rebellion, there is life, salvation, love, and deep reverence for the God of our salvation. That the picture of redemption from sin I want you to have.

A thousand words can never sufficiently paint a picture of the redemption from sin Christ Jesus, our Lord, have affected for us. Nevertheless, by the grace of the Holy Spirit let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.