

Seeing Ourselves, God and the World Differently February 6, 2022, Isaiah 6:1-13
All Saints Lutheran Church, Calgary

A letter to the congregation from Pastor Dave Saude...

I am not with you today because I am seeing things differently. Well, maybe not yet, but I soon will be.

By the time of this service, I will have had cataract surgery on one eye. That means my left eye will have a new, artificial lens, while my right eye will still depend on a different lens, different prescription, still relying on my eyeglasses. At the time of this service, February 6, my left eye will focus one way; my right eye will focus another. I cannot predict at this point, a few weeks still into January, how my brain will cope with this. Will I be able to read the scripture? Or the liturgy?

In any case, I will be seeing things differently.

A few days after this service, February 9, I will have the second operation. This time I will have a new, artificial lens inserted into my right eye, and I will hopefully throw away the right lens from my eyeglasses.

I will be seeing things differently.

But, why am I not with you today, February 6? There are two reasons.

First, February 6 falls between the first and second surgeries. There could be no way of guaranteeing how my brain will adjust to two very different lenses.

Seeing things differently requires a time of adjustments.

Pastor Wallace and the worship team considered several different ways to adapt. Could I prepare a message in advance and record it for a lay-led service?

Could I record a message, play the recording, and still be present, still preside over communion, with the remainder of the service lay-led?

Could I “trust in the Lord” and simply be present with you, relying on a way of seeing, as well as seeing from memory and by heart, and be fully present? With half a pair of glasses? And a heart full of faith?

But this brings me to the second reason why I am not here with you today. COVID 19. Particularly the Omicron variant.

At the time of this writing, the virus is spreading rapidly – very rapidly. One of my grandchildren was infected last week. A day later, her brother; then, their other brother. Then their mother. These children were on three different hockey teams. Every day this week, another player, and another became infected.

And, as happened with my grandchildren, when one child got it, the whole family got it.

And this was the pattern playing out in our hospitals. Children were coming into the hospital with symptoms. They were screened and swabbed. Patients tested positive. And when one child got it, the whole family got it.

And that meant whole families confined in quarantine for five or ten days. The conditions were not necessarily serious. But the impact on one and all was significant.

At the time of this writing, the Esso Minor Hockey Week was still scheduled to continue. But teams were already being impacted! Did the tournament continue, or was it cancelled?

I have no way of seeing that. But by now, you do.

Could I personally risk breaking protective isolation; could I risk infection and delaying access to my surgery, or delay recovering, or risk infecting someone else...or...?

I have no way of seeing that.

But now we know what happened with the hockey tournament – and returning to school – and returning to work...

We see things differently these days. We still cannot see the future. We sort of see the past – at least different perspectives, different vantage points, different choice points, different outcomes. We may experience the

same virus and the same timeframe, but we see things differently. And even in the same moment we see things differently. Go to school? Or not? Go to work? Or not? Wear a mask – what kind of mask – can we even get the necessary mask – or not? See a movie? Get a vaccination?

Or not?

Why am I writing these words at one time – to be read at a later time – about things we see one way or another, not clearly. As though through smoke. In awe and wonder, and fear, perhaps.

Certainly, we are in the presence of God.

Isaiah found himself in the presence of God. And the experience was full of wonder! God enthroned! High and lofty! God's robes - God's majesty – fill the Temple.

And there were angels! Not the cute, naked, chubby ones found in ancient paintings. Seraphs! Not sheriffs! Seraphs! Huge, fiery, typically armed with weapons! They had six wings, not two! They cover their faces with two – and their feet with two – and fly with the remaining two. And they sing! They fly and they sing! And their voices make the Temple shudder and shake. And the whole place fills with smoke – overwhelming Isaiah's nose and eyes!

This is all scaring Isaiah to death!

The Bible says that if you see God, you die! If Isaiah was truly seeing God – in all majesty and glory- he was about to die!

“Woe is me!” he cried. “I am a man of unclean lips! All around me are people with unclean lips!”

Could he imagine what he was seeing? Believe what he was seeing? Trust what he was seeing?

And then – one of the Seraphs picks up tongs and then a live, glowing coal from the Temple fire and- without so much as a how-do-you-do?- touches Isaiah's lips with the burning coal!

Now, what do you make of that?

“Now,” says the angel, “this has touched your lips and your guilt is gone. Your sin is gone!”

That was the angel’s voice.

Then came God’s voice!

“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”

First, Isaiah sees glory. Then he hears glory.

First, Isaiah thinks he is going to die – he ought to die.

First, Isaiah sees God and then Isaiah hears God. But instead of ending Isaiah’s life – now – God gives Isaiah a purpose... for the rest of his life!

Who will go?

And Isaiah says, “Here I am... Send me.”

Pause now and remember. Not that long ago an angel came to Zechariah telling him he would have a son who would be called John.

“What will you name the boy?” people asked.

“John,” Zechariah answered.

“But no one in your family has that name!” they argued.

(See, not everyone sees things the same way. Not everyone does as they are told.)

“His name will be John!” Elizabeth quietly insisted.

Pause now and remember. Not that long ago, an angel appeared to Mary and said – without so much as a how-do-you-do – “You will have a child – the Son of God.”

And Mary said – but not right away – “May it be so.”

Pause now and remember... Not that long ago wisemen came from the east. They were following a star, not an angel. They were looking for a

king. The King of the Jews. Naturally, being men, they got lost and needed to ask directions. They asked Herod. Herod would know.

But he didn't.

So, the wisemen continued on their way, still following the star. And Herod went his way, sending soldiers to find this newborn king and neutralize this threat to Herod.

Remember, the wisemen were led to Bethlehem.

(Shepherds had made the journey earlier. They had heard angels. Lots of them! Singing! So, they went to see for themselves.)

And the wisemen were asked, "Where are you going from here?" And they said, "Home."

"What about Herod?"

"Let him see for himself."

God has this way of showing up and asking, "Who am I going to send?" Sometimes people like Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary and star-followers from the east – and Isaiah – say, "Here I am... Send me."

See, God shows up and calls people – usually ordinary people – and gives them a purpose. Sometimes we see it.

Sometimes we don't

Ask Wallace sometime about when God showed up for him. Ask what God asked him. Ask whether Wallace said right away, "Here I am... Send me."

I didn't.

So, Isaiah says, "Send me."

To do what?

God then gives him a job description few of us would choose. Isaiah never saw it coming.

“I want you to go” – see, already this is going to put Isaiah out of his way.
“Go and tell the people, ‘Listen and listen and listen some more. But do not understand...”

“Look and look and keep looking. But do not find what you are looking for...”

“Isaiah, I want you to be such a successful preacher that you make the minds of the people dull. I want you to shut their ears and close their eyes....”

“But do not let them hear or understand or turn from their ways and be healed...”

Isaiah himself does not hear or see or understand. “How long do I do this for?”

God says, “Until the cities fall and the land is empty. And if so much as one streetlight remains upright – if one crop remains to be harvested – if one river remains unpolluted... burn it!”

Is that how you see it? Is that a job you would want – a future you would want?

And God says further, “Their hope will only be when they have nothing! The seed is in their barrenness!”

Is that how you see it in this time of pandemic – in this time of climate destruction? Probably few of us see it this way.

See the smoke. Smell the smoke. And hear the song of the angels. Do not despair. Our future is secure – even when – especially when – we have nothing!

Pause now and remember. It was only four billion years ago when there was nothing. Absolutely nothing! Then, a voice spoke. And the universe began to sing!

It was only two thousand years ago when the sky was dark. The earth was silent. A great stone stood over any hope of God's future – or anybody else's future.

That's how people saw things.

Then a handful of women said, "He is risen!" And the universe has been singing ever since.

Why would I want to write these words to you this day, words I cannot even speak myself?

Why would I want to send a letter when I could not raise the chalice or break the bread?

So much seems to threaten us. So much seems to frighten us. So much tries to keep us apart.

But then an angel touches our lips.

Not with a coal but a piece of bread.

Our Saviour touches our lips.

Not with a coal but a kiss of wine.

Your guilt is gone!

Your sin is removed!

Not just for today. Always!

You see the barrenness. You see our cities are not what they were. Our crops are not what they were. Our bodies are not what they were.

Our dreams are not what they were.

We did not see it this way.

Now we do.

We are transitioning.

It's like one eye sees one way. Another eye sees another. But our brain does not yet get it.

Smoke.

But also song!

COVID. Omicron. Fear. All keep me from saying to you, “Grace to you... and peace.... Take... and eat...”

But there is more to see. And say. And sing

You have a purpose! For the rest of your life!

Do you see it that way?

God is seeking you.... And sending you!

Do you see it that way?

Let the bread touch your lips once more....

Let the kiss of Christ touch your lips once more...

When the earth is barren... when our eyes are blind – we will see.

And we will say together, “Here we are!....Send us!”

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