

May 19, 2019 • Choir Recognition Sunday

## “An Awesome Vision”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



*Isaiah 6:1-8*

*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. Seraphs 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. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.*

*And 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!” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”*

This sermon for our annual Choir Recognition Sunday has proven to be quite a challenge and this I blame on our Director of Music, Jim Smith. You see, Jim really wanted the Chancel Choir to sing a particular anthem today: “In the year that King Uzziah died.” OK. But not only that, he insisted that the scripture passage on which this anthem is based be read as today’s Scripture reading. Isaiah 6:1-8. And thus, it fell to the preacher to make some sense of this and tie into our stated goal this morning of expressing our deep appreciation to the musicians who make our worship so beautiful and special each week.

So, Jim, I started with King Uzziah, about whom I admittedly knew very little, except that, as our anthem makes clear--he died. So I researched him and discovered some pretty interesting things about this particular king. First, he was a real king, who reigned over Judah for some 52 years, from 783-742 BCE. He had parents: King Amaziah and Queen Jecoliah. He’s noted several places in Scripture: 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and the Gospel of Matthew. It gets better. He was apparently one of the good kings of Judah and not one of the bad kings, and there were far too many of those. Bad kings who trampled on the rights of the people or enslaved them or just didn’t care too much what became of them.

King Uzziah, on the other hand, is remembered as a good king who had a long and illustrious reign. He caused the people to prosper. He was successful in military endeavors. He took a great interest in agriculture and viticulture. However, there was a severe earthquake during his reign, which I thought I probably shouldn’t mention here given our particular situation. His death, referenced in our anthem, wasn’t too great, either. Because he had been successful in many things, King Uzziah started to think too highly of himself and his pride got the best of him. He offended God and was struck down with leprosy and died.

Now, having done all this research, I still couldn’t quite figure out how to tie any of this story in to music for today’s service of Choir Recognition. I mentioned this to Nathan and Tricia and Nathan came up with a great idea. He suggested that I simply add that King Uzziah was in fact one of the earliest church musicians. Never mind that this is not mentioned in Scripture specifically, but then, who knows? Church musicians are often overlooked or taken for granted, right? So maybe he was a great lover of pipes and horns and tambourines and cymbals and so forth as might have befit the worship of his time.

Seriously, I don’t know if we can really make that claim about King Uzziah, as fun as it might be to ponder. But there is something additional that we do need to know about him in order to understand the passage we hear this morning from the book of the prophet Isaiah. King Uzziah’s death was the precipitating factor in the call of this prophet. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah, though he felt himself unworthy, Isaiah saw the Lord. Isaiah had a vision. He saw the Lord, high and lifted up, seated on the throne. He heard the voice of the Lord. He heard the seraphim, the heavenly host, singing “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

And Isaiah heard God asking: “Whom shall I send; who will go for us?” And Isaiah surprised himself and he heard himself answering: “Here I am; send me.”

You might ask yourself why God needed to raise up a prophet right at that moment? Why did God need to send someone to the people? For the people? Why? Why did God need for Isaiah to see and to hear and find his courage and rise up? Why? The significant point here is not *that* King Uzziah died or even *how* King Uzziah died – but *when* King Uzziah died. The year that King Uzziah died. His death coincided with a new, powerful harsh ruler coming to power in Assyria, a despot who had begun to consolidate his power throughout Mesopotamia, scooping up small states like Syria and Palestine, and when King Uzziah died the people were left vulnerable and without a champion to defend and protect them. The Lord needed Isaiah to become his prophet in that time.

God Most High appeared to Isaiah in a vision. God called Isaiah and sent Isaiah power much greater than himself that enabled him to become the person and the prophet God called him to be. For his time.

So here we find, I think, a much better way to tie this amazing story into our Choir Recognition Sunday. For real. In our worship of our holy, holy, holy God, don't we find that it is so often music that parts the veil and allows us, even just for a precious moment, to see and hear and know the presence of God? Isn't it music that takes our breath away in awe, or causes us to silence our own thoughts and minds long enough to take in what God would have us see and hear? Isn't it in music that our heart beats in harmony with the heart of God?

And we leave just a little bit more able to claim our own call to witness to God's love and compassion and peace and hope as we live into the coming week, in this real world, as advocates for God's people and channels of God's grace? A little voice in our heart whispering: "Here I am, Lord. Send me."

And so we set aside time this morning to say "Thank you" to our amazing musicians.

Choir Directors

Jamie Jones: Cherub Voices, the pre-school children's church singers  
Janet Searfoss: Children's Church Choir Director  
Mary Crawford: Amadeus Handbell Choir Director and accompanist for Children's Church Choir

Simple church musicians Jack McHugh and Holly Pitrago

Section Leaders/Soloists

Barbara Smith, Soprano  
Vera Lugo, Alto  
William Martinez, Tenor  
Ryan Brown, Bass

Our entire Chancel Choir

Ty Woodward Principal Organist

Dr. Jim Smith, Director of Music

Notes:

See Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.