

God Almighty or God All-matey?

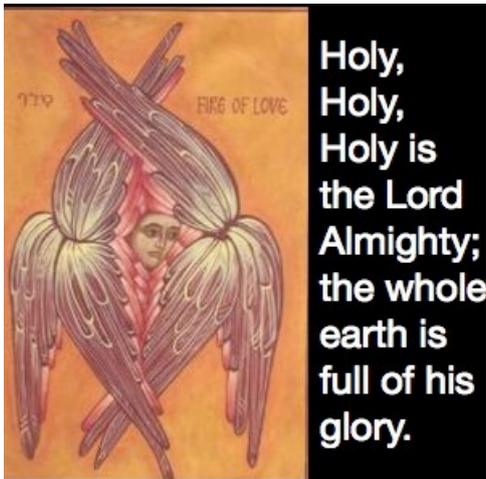
Isaiah 6:1-8

I've always loved the stained glass window at the front of the sanctuary, although very rarely do I get to look at it during worship, except when I am leading the song of praise. As I stand facing it, with my hands outstretched I find myself lost in this window which depicts the mystery of God's nature as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We don't tend to spend a great deal of time lost in wonder, love and praise, as the old hymn puts it. Some of you may have been in that space today as you were listening to the cantata. The beauty of the music, and the words that accompany it, may have given you a glimpse into the heart of God, the mystery of his holiness, and above all, the power of his love in his son, Jesus Christ.



Today, on the Festival of the Holy Trinity, we have gathered to praise and worship God for the intrinsic beauty of his being. We are spellbound by the mystery of God's identity as three persons, but one God. We are rightly awed by God's holiness, his otherness, his "almightiness". But praising the majesty of God makes us painfully, even frightfully aware of our brokenness, our sin, of how puny we are in comparison with the creator of all. We shrink back. We're rightly scared.



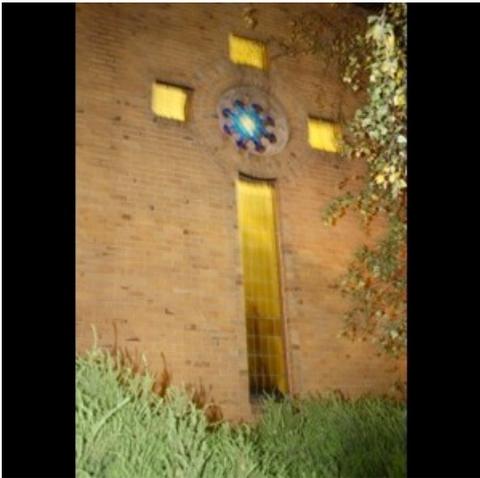
This is exactly how Isaiah felt as he unexpectedly encountered the presence of God in the temple. He wrote: "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." Isaiah had come face to face with the King of the universe, and his royal courtiers, "seraphim, each with six wings."

On their lips were words of praise directed to God. "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah knows, in a moment, that he doesn't belong here. He can't join in the song. He fears for his life. This God is not to be messed with. All he can think of saying is: "Woe to me! I am ruined! 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 Almighty."

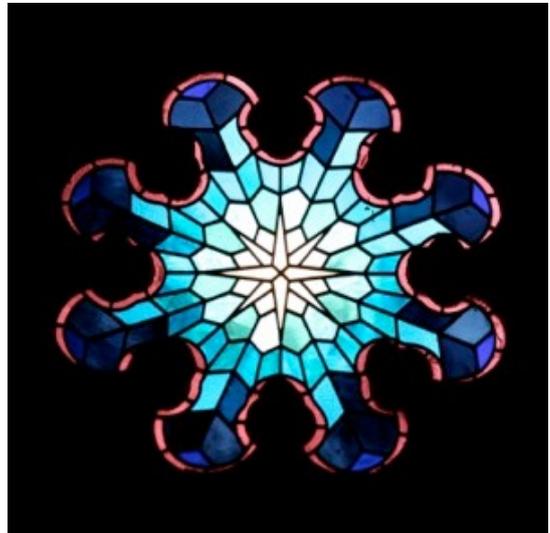
Have you ever felt this way about God? If God is holy, awe-inspiring, perfect, where does that leave us? What use is God's holiness, his perfection, if all it does is obliterate the people he has created in his image, in love? What happens next to Isaiah shows us how God deals with the threat his perfection poses to our ongoing existence.

“Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” We know that nothing impure can survive God’s presence. But Isaiah is not destroyed. Instead, he is transformed. God’s holiness flows out to him. God comes to make him pure. And then, as he has been cleansed, he is fit to speak for God and serve him, as his prophet.

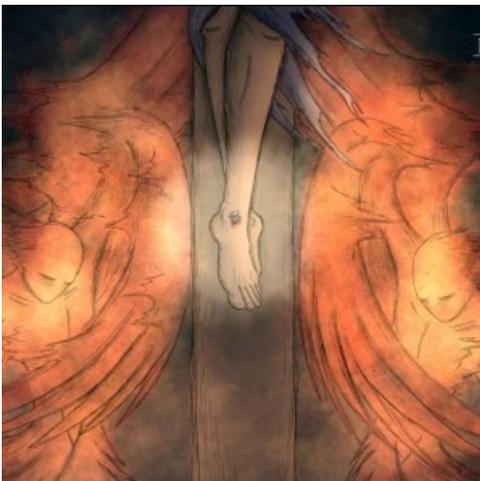


That’s where the second stained glass window comes in. I see it most of the time as I’m facing you. Turn around and have a look at it. It’s the cross.

Can you see the middle, a small window that reflects the theme of the triple-Trinity



window at the front. It says to me that the holiness of God is placed in the heart of the cross.



God is holy, that’s true. But he is also pure, blazing love, and out of that love he draws us into a relationship with him. The Holy God wants to make unholy people holy. This is why God send his Son Jesus on the mission to make us holy. Jesus, the Holy One of God, didn’t keep God’s holiness to himself, but spread it round, reaching out to the leper to heal, to the corpse to bring life, to foreigners and outsiders to bring them into God’s family. Finally, on the cross, he swapped places with us. The Holy One died the death of an unclean sinner. God

Almighty took an almighty hit for us.

Through this act of supreme love, we are made holy. We are adopted into the fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are adopted with Jesus as God’s children with the same holy status as Jesus. “For all of us who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God...” Our unholy mess is made holy in Christ, through the Spirit.

Bach understood this. He wrote: “What comforts me and makes me joyous is that my Jesus has not forgotten me. He did not come only to judge the world, no, no, He wished to mediate for sin

and guilt as intercessor between God and man. You [Jesus], have been born for my wellbeing, I believe this, I am encouraged by it.”

To know this and believe this is the heart of faith. To know that God has reached out to us, not to destroy us but to save us. And not because we are “holier than thou” but simply because of his love, that had to find a way through his holy anger at our sin. In Jesus God found the way, and we “were washed... sanctified... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God.”

Beyond this stained glass cross the world passes us by, in cars, on foot. This is where God wants to be, in this unholy mess of a world, bringing his life to others, holy people who use our holiness, our precious relationship with God, to bless others: loving them without strings attached, serving them without counting the cost, praying for them even when they don't and won't love us. God has grounded the mystery of his holy in Jesus, and that it what he is sending us to do. Amen.

