

Holy Smoke!  
(Passionate Worship)

October 13, 2019

UMCG

My major in college was Biblical Studies. I was also in the pre-seminary track since I sensed God was calling me to full time, ordained ministry. All Biblical Studies majors were required to take Music 101 our freshman year. The class lasted three quarters. Our instructor was Mr. Supplee who turned out to be a pretty good guy. For one thing, it helped that he had been raised in India by missionary parents so he could identify with many of us missionary kids (MKs). Our college attracted a large number of MKs and international students. It also helped that he geared his class to ministry in local church settings, whether here in the United States, or in cross-cultural settings around the world. He was really into ethno-musicology and that also spiced up the class.

Did you ever hear a sermon that was so powerful and meaningful that it has stuck with you your entire life? I can think of a few such sermons. (Just don't ask me about my sermon six months ago!) What about a class lecture? A lecture that has stuck with you your whole life? To this day, I vividly remember a lecture given by Mr. Supplee in Music 101 way, way back in 1972. Since those of us in class were going on to full time service as pastors or missionaries, he lectured on what he considered the quintessential biblical passage on worship—Isaiah 6. He offered this chapter as a model, a biblical model for worship.

Isaiah 6 is actually a “call” story. It recounts Isaiah’s call to ministry as a prophet of Israel. Isaiah’s call came to him while he was in the temple in Jerusalem around 640 BCE. One commentator made the cogent observation that, “such texts as this make it difficult to drive a wedge between a prophetic and a priestly vocation. (In other words, between being a prophet and a pastor or minister...And please, do not forget that through our baptisms we are all ministers.) The contemporary call to respond prophetically to social problems such as racism, poverty, and other forms of injustice typically is experienced in the context of prayer and worship.”(1) Another way to put this is that worship is central in our lives both

individually and corporately. All aspects of our relationships with God, with each other in the church, and with those outside the church, are impacted by, and flow out of meaningful worship!

So what does worship...biblical worship, look like? Mr. Supplee answered that question for us in his lecture. At its heart and at its best, worship is a powerful experience of the living God who changes us and transforms us. Worship reframes the way we see God, ourselves and the world in which we live. The key to understanding passionate, powerful, life changing worship, said Mr. Supplee, is to follow Isaiah's eyes...looking where he looked...seeing what he saw and experienced.

According to Isaiah 6, Isaiah had gone to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. There he experienced God in a vision. Since this is a vision...where does Isaiah look first? Verse 1 says, "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." Worship begins when we LOOK UP and see God. When we see God as God truly is. And what is that? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of God's glory!" Biblical scholar David Peterson writes that "undergirding this text...is a profound understanding of God. Virtually every line emphasizes that God is holy. Isaiah's account of standing in the awesome presence of God describes what many have considered to be the heart of all religious experience...an experience both mysterious and awesome."(2)

Where do Isaiah's eyes go next? After he sees God as God truly is...we're told that Isaiah turned his gaze INWARD, and with fear and trembling said, "Woe is me! I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips." What does this mean? This means that true worship involves not only seeing God as God truly is...holy and powerful. It also involves looking at ourselves...seeing ourselves for who we truly are: Imperfect people who do not live up to our own standards, much less God's standards of holiness, righteousness, justice and love! In theological jargon, we are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God...in desperate need of God's love and forgiveness. The truly Good News...the Gospel, is that when we see ourselves for who we are and call a

spade a spade...When we see and confess to God who we truly are...flawed people in need of God's love, grace and forgiveness...guess what? God does for us what God did for Isaiah: "Your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." 1 John 1:9 promises the same, that "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Worship begins when we experience God...when we look up and see God as God truly is—holy and loving. Worship continues as we look in...as we look inside ourselves and see who we really are, confess that to God, and receive God's love, grace and forgiveness.

But...worship doesn't stop there. Keep following Isaiah's eyes! Where does he look next? He looks OUT...away from himself. He no longer lives a self-centered existence. Oh no! Instead, he looks out and sees a broken world, a world filled with broken people and broken social systems that crush and injure people and bring harm to God's good creation! And when Isaiah saw the world as it truly was, only then was he able to hear the voice of the Lord calling, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'" And Isaiah's response? "Here am I, send me."

Today we start the first of three sermons that address our Vision 2020 focus on **Reaching Up** to God in passionate worship. The prior three weeks we have preached on **Reaching In** to one another with radical hospitality. A hospitality that invites people into the life of our faith community. That warmly welcomes everyone who comes and seeks to participate in our church. Radical hospitality not only invites and welcomes all persons...it goes on to help folks integrate into our life together and go on to grow as disciples of Jesus who are becoming more and more like Jesus.(3)

Lately we've been drawing upon a small book by Phil Maynard—*Shift: Helping Congregations Back into the Game of Effective Ministry*. Maynard's basic point is this. In order to be effective in ministry, in order to be a vital church, we must change...we must shift. Vital churches work hard to make the shift "From Fellowship to Hospitality." Vital churches also work hard to

make the shift from “Worship as an Event on Sunday morning to Worship as a Lifestyle.”

Today, the Prophet Isaiah has demonstrated the move, the shift, from worship as an event in a building (the temple) to worship as a lifestyle that makes a difference for good and for God every day of the week...out there...in the real world we inhabit.

Great worship prepares worshippers to live a life that moves from worship as an event on Sunday to worship as a lifestyle throughout the week. So what does this actually look like? Well, worship as a lifestyle is reflected in such things as how I choose to use my time, how I choose to use the resources God has given me, the priority I place on loving my family, the way I interact with difficult people, the way I treat my colleagues at work, the priority I place on spending time with God, my willingness to confront and resist injustice, even the excellence with which I perform my job. As with the prophet Isaiah, great worship as an event carries over into worship as a lifestyle that permeates every aspect of our lives throughout the week.

Amen.

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Footnotes 1, 2: *Commentary on Isaiah* by David Peterson, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, pp. 101-105.

3: I use the acronym **IWID** to describe the process of radical hospitality that begins with **Inviting** persons to attend some event in the life of the church. When guests do show up at church (whether it's worship or some other event), we need to warmly **Welcome** them. Welcoming should be linked with helping guests **Integrate** into the life of the church by connecting them with persons who share similar interests and events they would find interesting. And finally, all of this should lead to **Discipleship**, the lifelong process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. Discipleship means going deeper into one's faith and the Christian life. Regular involvement in worship, small groups, Bible studies, and mission outreach (Hesed House, Lazarus House, the Neighbor Project, ASP, overseas mission trips, etc.) boost growth as disciples who follow Jesus's teachings and example.