

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Reorientation of Being”**  
**Isaiah 6:1-8**  
**November 13, 2016**

**“In the year that King Uzziah died...”**

and we thought we had a politically tumultuous week. What we’re going through is a drop in the bucket compared to what Isaiah is experiencing.

Kings, after all, didn’t change every 4-8 years. Uzziah had been king in Judah, in the Southern Kingdom, for 52 years, and it was a good 52 years. Uzziah’s reign had been relatively peaceful and stable. You knew what to expect.

But you know, in antiquity, that all changes when a king dies. The death of any king sets off a game of thrones, right? All sorts of powerful people start grabbing for the throne and you have no idea what is about to happen.

Who will become the next king? Will there be a civil war? How long will it go on? What does the future hold? Will everything I know disintegrate into chaos?

Those questions are all in the air, swirling in Isaiah’s mind and heart... as he enters the temple **“in the year that King Uzziah died.”**

It’s ironic isn’t it? ...that the lectionary gives us this text, that starts this way, on this Sunday.

I mean, when these readings were lined out, no one was thinking about the election of 2016, and certainly no one knew what the outcome would be. So, it seems to me like there’s a kind of holy mystery in this, a sacred timing, that led our walk through the Old Testament narrative to take us to this text on this Sunday.

Because no matter who you are or how you voted this week, there’s a lot of uncertainty in the air. And you’re wondering, aren’t you, **“*what is about to happen?*”** The one thing we all know for sure is that something will happen.

This election was not inconsequential.

No, it doesn’t look like a civil war is breaking out,  
but there has been a rise in hate crimes across the country  
And I haven’t heard news of any military coup stirring,  
but there are protests in the streets.

Our uncertainty may not be as acute as Isaiah’s uncertainty. But it’s there, none-the-less.

There are questions in the air, swirling in our hearts and minds. Here we are, gathered in our own sanctuary, to worship God.

We are here because deep within, we want to encounter the ground of our being.

We want to know more fully the truth that sets us free.

We want to have the breath of life breathed into us again.

Because, as Augustine describes it, we've tasted the presence of God before, and now we hunger and thirst for it. God has touched us before, and now we long for God's peace.

And that's true no matter who you voted for this last week. It's true of us all... those who voted like you and those who didn't vote like you.

I know it makes some of you uncomfortable to remember this, but both of those kinds of people are in this room today... and there's a good chance that someone you'll hug today or shake hands with or laugh with today voted differently than you did.

And yet, here ***we all are***.

In this room, breathing the same air, singing with one voice, stumbling after Jesus as best as we know how. And it's shocking, isn't it, that someone following Jesus just like you might come to such different conclusions than you?

We might get our minds around it but it's hard to wrap our hearts around, isn't it?

Because our politics matter. Policy matters. Who our president is and who our governor is and who our senators are matter. Let's not be naive about that.

They matter for all kinds of reasons and for us in the church, they matter because the honest truth is... the gospel is political. We don't always like to acknowledge it, but it's true.

The Gospel is political.

It's not partisan, but it is political.

And that's the important distinction to make. Jesus was not a Republican or a Democrat. The gospel is not partisan. But it is political. You cannot divorce politics from Jesus.

After all, Jesus was executed as a political prisoner. He was creating social change and upheaval and was put to death because of that.

The political powers-that-be saw him as a threat, and executed him as an enemy of the state. On one very real, historical, concrete level, that's what took place on Golgotha 2,000 years ago.

But there was also something more going on, wasn't there? Otherwise, we wouldn't still be talking about him today. If Jesus was ***just*** a political social revolutionary, we wouldn't care so much today about what he said and did 2,000 years ago... and we wouldn't shape our lives to reflect his life... and our souls wouldn't know what it is to experience his grace and redemption and healing.

So, yes, Jesus was political. Yes, the gospel is political. But it is also something more... something deeper. And its aim has never been ***political power***.

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So, when Jesus went out into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days and then was tempted with all the political power in the world,

(“All the kingdoms of the world can be yours,” the tempter said),

Jesus recognized the temptation of political power for what it was...

a false god... that promises so much,

but asks for our soul in return.

**“Worship the Lord your God and serve God only,”** Jesus said.

And three years later,

when Jesus stood before Pilate, on trial for his life,

and Pilate asked him if he was the rightful king of the Jews,

Jesus answered, **“My kingdom is not from this world... but everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”**

Jesus’ message and life was very political, and it still is today. But his aim was never political **power**. And countless times throughout our 2,000 year history, the church has gotten that confused. We’ve equated political power with the power of God and the reign of God.

But the church, the people of God, have never been called to be the domineering power in our world. We are called to be an alternative community of love and grace and radical welcoming hospitality.

We are the yeast in the large batch of dough.

We are the mustard seed. Our ways look so small and insignificant, powerless even... and that can feel frustrating, I know. But when planted in the world, the outgrowth of this mustard seed’s life will surprise you.

So, as strong as you feel about the results of the election, one way or another, there is a much deeper reality that calls from us an even stronger response.

And if we’ll hear that, and allow it to take root in us, the results will be 100 fold greater than you can imagine.

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**“In the year that King Uzziah died,”** Isaiah is reeling in uncertainty about the political future of his world. With fears and questions and the great unknown hanging in the air, he enters the temple... and something profound happens.

He sees what he had never seen before... The Lord God, the Holy One, sitting on the throne... so much larger than anything he has seen or known before. Just the hem of God’s robe fills the temple.

And the ground beneath Isaiah begins to tremble with the loud echoes booming and vibrating through his body and this building.

This loud sound: “HOLY! HOLY! HOLY!”

The words shake the temple.

The doorways vibrate as if it is going to all crumble.  
“THE WHOLE EARTH IS FILLED WITH GOD’S GLORY. HOLY! HOLY!  
HOLY!”

It’s a terrifying encounter of awesome reality itself.  
Isaiah is glimpsing the deep reality that is the essence of our world and the  
essence of our lives. This is not some simple conversion moment for him.

Isaiah’s already a priest and a prophet. We’re 6 chapters into this book. This is no  
mere calling story. This is an awakening... to the ***One who was and is and always shall  
be.***

It’s an awakening to divine mystery that called the world into being,  
the divine mystery that shook at Mount Sinai  
when Moses and the Hebrew people came to the holy mountain  
the divine mystery that is larger than the universe  
and more present than the clothes on our body...  
the divine mystery that is flowing through the atoms  
that make up your flesh and bones.

Isaiah awakens to this terrifying intimacy of being known. “**Woe is me,**” he says.  
And in this moment a profound reorientation of his very life takes place.

In the presence of the Holy Mystery, Isaiah becomes painfully aware of his  
smallness, his own insignificance. This moment is incredibly disorienting...  
because ***all of us want to believe that we are the center of our own world...  
and our ideas are the central truth of the world.***  
Our ego needs to believe that. It wants to believe that.

But suddenly Isaiah awakens to a reality where he is not the central presence of  
his own life.

He is only dust and ashes.  
***He is utterly insignificant.***  
“Woe is me!” he says.

This great awakening is like an earthquake in his being. The tectonics within him  
shift. It’s one thing to know about God. It’s another thing altogether to encounter the  
divine presence like this.

I mean... *this is no comforting presence felt in nature.*  
*This is no peaceful assurance of God’s care that you might find in a sunset.*

***This is an encounter with the overwhelming divine holy presence that  
fundamentally reorients your very being.***

It’s the kind of moment where you recognize all the false identities and false  
hopes and false allegiances that you have been hanging your life on.

It's the kind of moment that allows you to live life from a fundamentally different center than your own self.

That's what begins to happen to Isaiah. He awakens to his own smallness, his own brokenness. The burning coal touches his lips. What was false is burned away.

And once that falsehood is burned away, he hears the invitation:

**"Who will go for us?"** The loud voice on the throne echoes out.

**And Isaiah cries out: "Here I am. Send me!"**

Isaiah is reoriented to the ground of all being, and then sent back out into his life to live from that very different place. He's a very different kind of prophet because of this moment.

In fact, he goes out and becomes one of the greatest prophets, one of the greatest spiritual leaders in the history of Israel. And yes, he's still quite involved with the politics of his day. He interacts with future kings and future political decisions.

But he is also something much more.

You see, his, "Here I am, send me" ... isn't first and foremost about activism, or one of the issues of his day, or who the next king will be. Yes, it may involve those things. In fact, it will undoubtedly involve those things.

But it's first and foremost about a life, grounded in God, becoming fully God's person, reoriented, recentered in the divine life.

It's about the same mystery that Paul describes when he wrote, **"I have been crucified with Christ and no longer live, but Christ lives in me."**

Something has been burned away.

Something has died.

And their lives are being lived from this place of deep connection with God.

***They are fundamentally operating from a different kind of place.*** And because of that, they change their world.

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Which should tell us, that who we are becoming, should matter more to us, than who the President of the United States is.

Because, while you have a very, very small say in who sits in the Oval Office, you are the only one who is responsible for cultivating your soul.

You're the only one who can put things in place in your life to become more open **to God's holy mysterious presence** so that you become more loving, more gracious, more wise.

You're the only one who can cultivate in you a deep relationship God... where you're grounded in, centered in, the transformational Christ life.

That is your deepest truest calling. Because when that begins to happen,  
something begins to emanate from you. Your presence changes the world around you.

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Because the honest truth is, you will always live and act and react out of who you  
are in your inner world... out of where your inner-self is grounded.

Jesus taught us about transformation of the heart, because that is what transforms  
our world. And it's interesting that now brain science and the most modern psychology  
are catching up to Jesus and telling us the same thing.

They say that we are not who we think we are. The conscious world of our  
thoughts and decisions are not in control even half the time.

Scientists are telling us that Descartes got it wrong when he said, **"I think  
therefore I am."**

We don't exist because we "think."

We are not primarily rational beings, not really.

The subconscious world, that deep inner life of the soul, has a lot more to do with  
who we are, how we act, and what kind of fruit our life will have. In other words, ***you  
live out of the deep milieu of your inner world,***

a world that you can't see

and don't recognize most of the time..

***You are not who you think you are.***

You are this subconscious, soul reality. And it's out of that deep place that you  
think and act, and affect your world.

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And for most of us, that inner word, the ground on which we live... is shifting  
around an awful lot of the time. You may have felt the ground shift under your feet when  
you woke up Wednesday morning and read the paper, and you were a different kind of  
person on Wednesday than you were on Tuesday.

Or you may have felt the ground under you shift when you got into a fight with a  
family member or a co-worker.

Or you may have felt it when you achieved something you've been hoping for,

Or you may have felt it when you lost something dear to you.

The truth is, for most of us, the ground of our inner world gets tossed back and  
forth like a wave of the sea.

And if you're honest with yourself,

if you could see yourself,

you'd know you've lived most of your life as a slave to those shifting tides.

But the saints will tell us, we don't have to. Your being, your inner world, doesn't  
have to be defined by tomorrow's headlines,

or the next surprise at work,  
or the next argument at home.  
You don't have to be a slave to those shifting tides.

You can do the gradual work to open yourself to the divine presence in your life,  
and become increasingly whole, where what is false is burned away, and you are  
fundamentally recentered in the deepest truth of your life. You are recentered in this  
encounter, recentered in this relationship with God.

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And so if we want to change our world,  
if we want to impact this world with God's radical love and goodness and  
healing and hope,

then maybe.... maybe we should spend less time reading posts on Facebook,  
and more time in prayer.

Maybe we should spend less time listening to another political commentary,  
and more time listening to the saints about the spiritual life.

Maybe we should spend less time sending anxious messages and being caught up  
in anxious conversations with our friends  
and more time in joy and laughter and thanksgiving for the beauty and  
goodness of life and inviting others to join us in it.

No, it may not change you today...  
and it may not look like it's changing our world at all.

But gradually, by living a God-oriented life, the yeast of God's kingdom will  
work its way into your being. And the tectonics in your soul will be reoriented.

And when that happens,  
the mustard seed of your one individual life  
will undoubtedly produce some surprising growth...

And our world will be changed because you are emanating the life of God.  
This is our deepest calling in Christ.

Amen.