

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL

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Worship Series: *A Top-Down Faith*

Service Theme: *Only a Triune God Can Provide What Only a Triune God Can Offer*

Sermon Theme: *A God Like No Other*

May 26, 2024— Isaiah 6:1-8

A Top-Down Faith. Maybe the meaning of our new sermon series requires a little explanation. It has nothing to do with riding in convertibles. Rather, the phrase “From the top down” is used to describe a hierarchical system of governance or management where the will, beliefs, and directives of those “at the top” are imposed on those below. “From the top down” often has a negative connotation, because the will of those at the top is sometimes imposed on those below in aggressive, threatening, or even oppressive ways.

That might make it seem counter-productive to call Christianity a “top-down faith.” And certainly some people would agree with that sentiment. They reject Christianity as nothing more than some church leaders aggressively pushing their will and agendas down people’s throats, and oppressing those below them with threats of eternal punishment.

However, we’re not ashamed to say that ours is a top-down faith, because Christianity’s beliefs and teachings come from a top that’s so much higher than some church leaders. They come all the way from the topmost top—from God himself! Each week in this series, we’ll discuss a top-down truth—given from God to us! And not in an oppressive sense. Rather, top down because they’re so good and beneficial for us, they can only come from God!

On Holy Trinity Sunday, the first top-down truth is who the God who gives us these truths really is! As we examine a vision God gave the prophet Isaiah, we’ll see that he’s **A God Like No Other!**

Isaiah is one of God’s greatest and most important prophets. His ministry to the people of Judah stretched over about 60 years, warning

the immoral, idolatrous people of Judah that divine judgment was coming. But also sharing a message of hope, comfort, and restoration, pointing ahead to the promised Messiah who would come as King and Savior. More than any other prophet, God uses Isaiah to reveal prophecies that point to Jesus as the Messiah—from the promise of Immanuel, born of a virgin in Isaiah 7, to the description of the silent sacrificial Lamb led to the slaughter in Isaiah 53.

But this morning, we’ll start at the beginning of Isaiah’s ministry, when God first called Isaiah to be his prophet. Isaiah records, ***“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*** History tells us that King Uzziah of Judah died in 740 B.C. That same year, God gave Isaiah a glimpse of himself seated in the throne room of Heaven. And it was quite a sight! ***“Above him were seraphim (a type of angel) each with six wings: With two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”***

In this vision, God clearly reveals his greatness and glory! Isaiah calls him, ***“Adonai,”*** the Lord—not in all caps—a name which emphasizes God’s power and authority. Seated on the throne of the universe, the “Almighty” one ruling over all things with limitless power and complete control, the God whose glory fills the whole earth. A God so glorious that the angels’ praises shakes the very pillars and foundations of Heaven! It’s not a picture of a God who warrants yawns, shoulder shrugs, or distracted attention, is it?

But don’t basically all religions depict their “gods” as being all-powerful and glorious? The kind of gods who have the power to pull the strings of this world in whatever way they want, and pulverize puny people at will? Even the atheist who doesn’t believe in a “god” puts their trust in people or things that they believe have the power to accomplish their desires. So what makes the God of the Bible any

different than the gods of the Hindu Vedas, or Islam's Quran, or Greek and Roman mythology?

However, God reveals himself as more than just powerful and glorious in Isaiah's vision. As the angels proclaimed, God is ***“Holy, Holy, Holy.”*** So much more than “good,” God is completely and utterly perfect! So holy that even the powerful, glorious, holy angels cover their faces and feet in reverence and humility in God's holy, glorious presence!

But the angels repeat the holy three times, not just to drive God's holiness home, but because of who God is! Maybe you caught it, but towards the end of the account, Isaiah hears God ask himself, ***“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”*** Why does a singular God refer to himself in the plural?

Scripture clearly teaches that there is only one God. Not three Gods, or a thousand gods, but one. God taught the Israelites, ***“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”*** Through the same Isaiah who hears God say this, God also proclaimed, ***“I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.”***

Yet, in the same breath, Scripture also names three distinct, separate persons when referring to God. Jesus commanded us to baptize ***“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,”*** not in the ***“names!”*** And at Jesus' baptism, all three persons of the Trinity were present. God the Father speaks from Heaven about Jesus, ***“This is my Son whom I love,”*** while God the Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a dove. That's why at Creation, God, speaking to himself before anything else was, says, ***“Let us make man in our image.”*** And that's why Isaiah hears God refer to himself as an “us” here.

As “Holy Trinity Sunday” suggests, God is ***“Triune,”*** a ***“Trinity,”*** because God tells us throughout Scripture that he's a three-in-one God. One God, not three gods. Yet, three distinct and separate persons within the Godhead—each one equal to the others in power, glory, and value. Each one eternal, not created, without beginning or end. Each one fully and completely God, not parts or fractions of God.

While some religions teach there's one God, and others say there are thousands of gods who each play a small niche role in making the world go-round, there's only one that describes a three-in-one God. Only one which describes God in a way that is completely beyond our ability to explain or wrap our minds around. Who would invent this concept of God? Doesn't that tell us something? That we have a God like no other, because he's the only God!

But while we joyfully sing the *Sanctus* on Communion Sundays, which echoes the “Holy, Holy, Holy” of the angels in Isaiah's vision, what does the Holy, Holy, Holy of the angels do to Isaiah? The reality of their words filled him with terror! He recounts, ***“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”***

The reality of the Triune God's holiness filled Isaiah with terror, because he knew that he wasn't holy, holy, holy. Isaiah knew what God had warned Moses, ***“No one may see me and live.”*** He knew King David's words from Psalm 5, ***“You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.”***

Because of Isaiah's sin and lack of holiness, he understood that the holy God who demands holiness had every reason, right, and ability to turn him into a grease spot on the floor of Heaven's throne room. And as sinners who lack holiness, the same is true for us. We have no right or ability to stand in God's holy presence. We have every reason to be completely terrified of a just, holy God, because he has every reason, right, and ability to destroy us eternally!

But thank God that we have a God like no other! In every other religion, people have to earn the love and blessing of their god by performing certain prescribed rituals, or by measuring up to a certain standard. Those who are disobedient are destroyed, while those who do enough to earn the god's approval will be rewarded. And while it's

true that God is just and holy, and will punish sin and unbelief, our God is a god like no other because he's a God of grace and mercy!

Rather than destroying Isaiah like he deserved and expected, look what God does instead. ***“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.”*** The holy God doesn't get rid of sin by destroying the sinner, but by removing sin from the sinner. Instead of annihilating sinners, God makes atonement for sinners! Instead of demanding that sinners cleanse themselves, in his grace and mercy, he comes to cleanse them!

The angel took that burning coal from the altar. The altar, where sacrifices were made for the sins of the Israelites, and to point them ahead to the ultimate sacrifice that would be made to atone for the sins of the whole world. The sacrifice made when one of those persons of the Trinity, God the Son, became the Son of Man. When God crossed the divide and came to us so that he could willingly suffer the punishments of Hell and die the death earned by sinners as the perfect substitute for all! So that we can stand before God's heavenly throne not in terror—but at perfect peace with God.

That's why Isaiah calls God the “LORD”—this time in all caps—a name which denotes God as the Savior-God, the covenant God who never fails to keep his promises to his people.

And that's why we don't blush or balk at having a top-down faith. Because it's been given to us by a God like no other—a God who is exactly the kind of God we need. A God who is a perfect balance of complete power and authority; of holiness and perfection; and of grace, mercy, and love! It's only fitting that God shows us who he is through a prophet named Isaiah, because Isaiah's name means exactly what the Triune God's will and purpose is—**“The LORD Saves.”**

Just like Paul wrote in our reading from Romans, all three persons of the Triune God work in perfect unity to save us eternally! ***“The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.”*** By the Holy

Spirit working through the Word, we're brought to faith and are rightly called “children of God!” ***“By the Spirit we cry, “Abba, Father.”*** By faith, we can come before the throne of God the Father with peace and confidence, like children running to their daddy for a hug. Therefore, the Son of God is our brother, because he has cleansed us of our sin! Because through his suffering and death, we've been made ***“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...that we may also share in his glory.”*** The Triune God is a God like no other-- exactly the kind of God we need.