

On March 6, a week and a half ago, as well as last Sunday, I quoted a special teaching from ancient Israel of long ago. What did I quote? It was this: Long ago, in ancient Israel, the teachers of the people would say that the definition of a hero was *someone who could turn an enemy into a friend.* I proceeded to quote St. Paul from 2 Corinthians 5 who very simply but deeply talked about how God has worked to reconcile us to Himself by sending Jesus to us. Paul built on that by saying that we have now been asked to be a part of God's ministry of Reconciliation. It is our job to turn enemies into friends, to mend what has been torn, to restore relationships between people.

I just read very special words for us from the Prophet Isaiah. This passage from chapter 6 is known as **“Isaiah’s Call Vision.”** This is the scene if you will, where he is going to get his job. By the way, he is going to have a very difficult job. We need to be reminded that when God calls us to a job, there is never any guarantee of success. I am not sure where we ever got the idea that just because God calls us to something, that it all means that things will come up roses. This goes for individuals but also for groups and even for churches and denominations.

I was all set to talk about this story of Isaiah 6 and how it is such an important story regarding our own individual sense of forgiveness. That is a good sermon waiting to happen. It still is. But after what happened a few days ago on the other side of the world, it kind of knocked the wind out of me, and I mean that situation where you are punched in the belly and you can't

breathe for a moment, and you panic. It is not a good feeling, and it hasn't happened to me for 50 years, and it would be fine if it doesn't happen again. But when a heavily armed man filled with absolute hate walks up to people in a building who have gone there to pray, and the first person who sees him says "Welcome Brother" and still the 28-year old man shoots the greeter who has welcomed him, we have to wonder what kind of crazy, insane world this has become. More than ever we need heroes who can turn an enemy into a friend.

Let me share a very quick word about Isaiah 6: this is such a special passage for us, although one that is filled with its own problems and difficulties if we choose to read beyond where we stopped today. A King has died, in fact a good king, and those were rare. His son who is not skilled or decent of heart is about to take over. Isaiah is at his coronation, but instead gets taken up to a different throne room. Now he wakes up and he is in God's throne room in a different world. It is a scary place with flying Seraphim who sing in Hebrew! There is smoke in there, and suddenly Isaiah realizes he is in the Presence of the LORD of Hosts, and that is way above his pay grade! He puts it the way good ANE people would put it: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I am of a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the LORD of Hosts." Translation? I am an impure human, from a big bunch of impure humans, and now I have seen a little bit of the shape of Melek HaOlam, the King of the Universe through this smoke, and that means I am about to die! But there is a different outcome...

Instead of getting vaporized for looking at God, which we learn **not** to do from watching the first Indiana Jones movie (!) one of the seraphim gets a hot coal from the altar and touches it to Isaiah's unclean lips. Rather than it burning him terribly, it doesn't. But the seraph says "Hey, you were just forgiven." Isaiah has the greatest turn of events. He thinks he will die soon. Instead he has been restored before God, even though he is surely from a people of unclean lips