

Show Up. Say Something. Be Available. Isaiah 6:1-8 May 7, 2006**Pastor Brad Smith****The Sermon in Three Sentences:** Show up. Say Something. Be available.**Why I Am Preaching It:** To give the congregation a pattern for the worship of God.

When I greet people after the service on the Sundays that I preach, one man always gives me a one sentence summary of my sermon. I like that. It tells me he has been thinking about what I have said. Well, I don't have this sermon down to one sentence yet, but here it is in three sentences: Show up. Say something. Be available. That's my three sentence definition of Christian worship. Show up. Say something. Be available. Each one builds on the one before. It is not a bad definition of the whole Christian life. Isaiah showed up. That is, he drew near to God in the way that he knew how. He said something to God. That is, he did not approach worship as a passive spectator, but he spoke to God about what he was experiencing. And finally, the experience of worship led him to service. That is all God asked of Isaiah, and I believe it is all God asks of us as well.

At first reading this description of Isaiah at worship may seem strange and overwhelming. We hardly know what it is talking about. How can we even visualize the train of God's robe, let alone creatures with six wings? It sounds like a description of another planet. But there is a pattern here in Isaiah's worship that holds for us as well. Keep in mind: Show up, Say something, and Be available, and I think we will find the passage to be a more practical picture of worship for us than it seems at first.

We will need to jump in with some historical background. A little more than 200 years before Isaiah's ministry, King Solomon had built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. Solomon died, and the nation split into Israel in the north, and Judah, which included Jerusalem, in the south. King Uzziah or Azariah reigned in Judah for fifty-two prosperous, stable years. Today's passage occurs in the year that King Uzziah died. That would have been someplace between 739 and 737 B.C.

Now the only king that most of the people had ever known was dead, or at least lay dying. Nobody could do anything about it. Nobody knew what would happen. The Assyrians were a rising power in the northeast. Would they conquer Judah? What would happen next? Everything felt unstable, uncertain, dangerous.

In the lives of nations, of congregations, of families, and of individuals, we all have our, “. . . year that King Uzziah died.” We probably have several. Nothing is quite the same after that event. Our most recent such event nationally was 9/11. Other, smaller examples could be events such as, In the year that our pastor got sick and had to retire early. In the year that Mom died. In the year of the divorce. In the year that I had to go on disability. In the year of the cancer diagnosis. In the year that I was robbed. We never again see life quite the way we did before.

We have no control over these events, just as Isaiah had no control over the death of his king. But although Isaiah was not in control of his circumstances, he was not a puppet, either. He made a choice. He chose to go to the temple. That is the first step in worship. Isaiah showed up.

Although the Israelites knew that God was everywhere, the temple in Jerusalem particularly symbolized the dwelling place of God, the place where heaven met earth. And that is where Isaiah went. He had been there many times before, and he continued to go for the rest of his life as far as we know. It was his custom. He showed up.

Solomon’s temple no longer exists. We cannot approach God by the same means that Isaiah did. But God has provided ways for us to approach him as well. They are not difficult. They can become our custom as well.

One of the main ways is through his people. We might approach God by attending a worship service with hundreds of people. Additionally, we might gather in a small group of Christians, or even with one other so that we can pray together.

God speaks through his word, so we can approach him in individual or group Bible study, or through the sermon. We have just approached him through the Lord’s Supper. Those, I believe, are 21st century equivalents of going to the temple. They are ways that we can show up today.

So Isaiah sought God in the way that he knew. He showed up. And God showed up, too. I don’t think Isaiah had any idea of what was about to happen. We know some of what he would have found in the temple. There would have been other people there worshiping along with him. There might have been choirs singing the psalms. He would have seen the smoke of the

incense as it was offered, and he might have been there when sacrifices were being offered on the altar. All this he would have experienced with his physical senses.

But in this particular moment of worship he was also given a glimpse of the spiritual reality beyond the physical reality. No words can adequately describe his vision, but we can get some sense of it.

The Bible tells us that Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne, but that it was not the Lord face to face, but rather the train of his robe. Centuries before, Moses was allowed to see the back of God for a moment but not his face. The Gospel of John tells us that no one has ever seen God. But from time to time God allows tiny glimpses of his power, his love, his majesty. In some way, Isaiah experienced God more powerfully than he ever had before.

The six-winged seraphs were more awesome and holy than anything we have seen, yet even they covered themselves with their wings, and hid their faces from the glory of God. They sang of God's holiness. If you only have eyes to see, they sang, you will find that the whole earth reflects the power, the glory, the wonder of God. For a moment, Isaiah had those eyes to see.

Isaiah's world had been shaken by the death of King Uzziah. Now it was far more shaken by the presence of God. The threshold and the doorway of the temple shook. It reminds us of the earth quaking at Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given, or the earthquake when Jesus rose from the dead, or the great earthquake of Revelation at the end of the world. For a moment, Isaiah became intensely aware of God with him, above him, and around him.

Although Isaiah chose to worship God in the temple, he could not choose how God would meet him. Isaiah must have gone to the temple regularly. We have no evidence that he went this time expecting this vision that he received, or that he psyched himself up for it, or even that it ever happened to him again.

And it would have been a big mistake on Isaiah's part to try and force this experience on other people, or to try and make it happen again for himself. This manifestation of the presence of God came from God alone.

We will find the same to be true when we approach God as well, whether it is in worship, in prayer with another, in the Lord's Supper, or some other way. Each time is unique, and we must never try to recreate what happened to somebody else, or what happened to us on some other occasion.

When I was a young Christian I went to the Urbana Missionary Convention. A woman told me, her face glowing, how deeply moved she had been by the thousands of students singing praises to God in the huge auditorium. I had been there as well, but had not felt moved at all. We had both, in obedience to God, showed up to worship with his people. That was all he expected, and he was free to meet each of us in his own way.

I frequently pray with people. Once when a friend was praying for me I looked at his face. It was still his face, but it was also the face of Jesus. That is the best that I can explain it. It lasted for only a few moments, and it has never happened to me since. I am not a better Christian than those who have never had such an experience. I am no worse than people who have had it frequently. For whatever reason, God allowed me for a brief time to see that we really are the body of Christ. When we serve and pray for each other, Jesus is actually doing the serving and the praying.

We have just participated together in the Lord's Supper. That is a way of approaching God. I regularly take communion to homebound people. One lady wept for joy upon receiving the elements, and it was an important moment in her healing. She does not normally respond that way to communion. I take communion to other people and they have no such deep sense of the presence of God. I usually do not, either. That's ok. We show up. God asks us to approach him, and to leave the results to him.

Our first step in worship, then, is to show up. The next step builds on the first one. Once you have showed up and God has met you, say something to him. Isaiah said something to God. "Woe is me! I am ruined!" Peter had a similar response when he began to see Jesus for who he really was and said, "Depart from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." When Jesus approached the corrupt tax collector Zacchaeus, he could not contain his joy, and he said to Jesus that he was going to give away most of his money. In Genesis when God approached Abraham and shared his plan to judge the evil city of Sodom, Abraham argued with God.

Others in the Bible seemed to experience God's absence instead of his presence, though they may have known by faith that he was with them. They, and Jesus himself, said to God: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Like God's people from biblical times, we need to approach God. And however God meets us or seems not to meet us, we need to say something to him about it. If we take the Lord's Supper and are filled with a sense of unworthiness as Isaiah was in the temple, we confess it to God and perhaps to someone else. If we find ourselves filled with joy in fellowship with others as Zacchaeus was when he met Jesus, we tell him what we are going to do about it. If we come to worship week after week and simply find it boring, if we cannot connect with it, we need to complain to God. He can handle it. Perhaps the most offensive response to God is not bothering to say anything to him at all.

So worship means to Show Up. For Isaiah, it meant going to the temple in Jerusalem. For us it might mean committing to come to the worship service, or to a small group, or to a personal or group Bible study. Worship means to Say Something to God. Respond to him. Isaiah said, "Woe is me!" We might say the same thing, or something quite different. Speaking to God is essential to worship. God longs to hear from us. But worship must never end with God and ourselves in a cozy huddle. We rejoice in God's love, we praise him for the forgiveness of sins, with the result that we are motivated, we are empowered for service beyond ourselves. A fruit of worship is to Be Available.

Isaiah offered himself for service. And it is crucial to see that he offered to be sent before he knew any of the details. He had a childlike faith. As an adult, if somebody asks if I can do them a favor I usually answer, "Tell me what it is and I'll tell you if I can do it." But if you ever do one of the children's moments in the worship service and you ask for a volunteer, most of the children will raise their hands eagerly before they know what you plan to ask of them. They trust that you will not ask the impossible of them, and that what you ask of them will be good.

And that is the final step of worship. "Here am I. Send me." If our worship does not result in our being available to God, then it is incomplete. Many in this congregation over the years have said, "Here am I. Send me." Just among those that I have known personally, some have been sent into a

ministry of hospital visitation. Others into ministry to prisoners or to their families. Others to seek for a more just distribution of food to hungry people. Others to care for the elderly. Still others to the nursery, others to the kitchen. Others to ministry in Japan, in Israel, in Latin America.

Show up. Say something. Be available. Let us pray.