

Expectations
[Isaiah 6:1-8](#)
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My younger brother John spent a couple of years in Orlando, Florida working at Walt Disney World, at the Canadian Pavilion in EPCOT. Disney World is supposed to be the Most Magical Place on Earth, or The Happiest Place on Earth, or something like that – people spend tens of thousands of dollars to book these dream vacations, staying in elaborate, deluxe themed resort hotels, to experience the insane spectacle of the Disney Entertainment Conglomerate churning out whimsy on an industrial scale. While John was working there, he could get family members into the park for free, so we took a couple of trips down to Florida to see the park for ourselves, and it is a seriously impressive operation – this army of workers and entertainers and custodians and imagination engineers, all working constantly to make your day special – every detail was fine tuned to make even the smallest moment somehow unique. But the thing is, as impressive a place as Disney World is, I don't think I'd want to work there. I don't think I'd want to live there. The impression I got from my brother and the people he worked with is that it didn't take long before the magic wore off. When you're working there everyday, dealing with the heat and humidity, the stress, the behind-the-scenes conflict, the daily grind of getting through your shift, it wouldn't take long before you barely notice the insane carnival of

theatrics going on all around you. You just go in, do your job, and go home. You're not expecting to see any magic.

I wonder if that was how Isaiah felt. Isaiah was a priest in the Temple in Jerusalem – his job, his entire purpose in life, was to take care of God's house, the one place on the surface of the planet where God's people knew their saviour and King could be found. Every year, pilgrims came from all over Israel to worship at the temple, bringing sacrifices to offer to the God who had saved their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the promised land. This was the temple first imagined by their greatest King, David, built by his son and successor, Solomon, the greatest work of art and architecture that the people of Israel had created, filled with all the treasured symbols of their identity as God's people – the ark of the covenant, the tablets of the law from Mount Sinai, the manna from the wilderness, all the furnishings that God had commanded them to create from the finest gold and silver and precious materials. For most of the people of Israel, the temple was the most spectacular sight they would ever lay eyes on – in a world of dirt and sweat and toil, the temple was impossibly beautiful; in a world of greys and browns and tans, the temple was an explosion of colour. But for Isaiah, the Temple was just another day at work. All the old stories of how God had worked in the world in the past, coming among the people in power and glory in pillars of cloud and fire, all that was ancient history, stories from hundreds of years earlier when Isaiah's great, great, great grandfather was serving as priest. Isaiah comes to God's house

every day, but he isn't expecting God to actually be there. He isn't expecting anything to actually happen. He goes in, does his job, and goes home. He isn't expecting to see any magic.

Until one day, when Isaiah heads into the temple for another ordinary day of work, his hands full with all his papers for the day and his morning cup of coffee and bagel, still humming along with the last song that had been playing on the radio on the drive into town, and he fumbles with his keys in the door and pushes it open and walks in and WHAT IS GOING ON. Instead of the same old Temple he's worked in every day for his entire life, with the altar and the lamps and the decorations, today there is an enormous throne, filling the entire room, and sitting on that throne, shrouded by smoke and fire and light, is the creator of the universe, the Almighty King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and all around him there are these flying seraphim, bizarre winged fire serpent beings, and they are screaming at each other with voices loud enough to shake the temple and the mountain beneath it, HOLY HOLY HOLY IS THE LORD OF HOSTS THE EARTH IS FILLED WITH HIS GLORY. And Isaiah drops everything, his coffee and bagel and papers and car keys scatter everywhere, and he falls to his knees in confusion and absolute terror, and he must've been thinking, they didn't train me for this. I don't have the skill set to deal with all of what I'm seeing in front of me. There's no entry in the manual for dealing with screaming flying fire snake monsters. In that moment, Isaiah must have felt entirely inadequate to deal with what he was witnessing, to even begin to respond

to this new, unexpected crisis unfolding all around him. In that moment, all Isaiah can manage is despair – It’s all over. I am doomed.

And in that moment, Isaiah is entirely right. He is inadequate. He can’t handle what he’s seeing. But even though in that moment, Isaiah is inadequate for the crisis he’s facing, God’s got a plan to change that. One of the seraphim flies down to the altar and carefully uses tongs to pick up a burning coal and brings it over to Isaiah and tells him to pucker up – this fiery coal is going right on Isaiah’s lips. And again, looking at this from Isaiah’s perspective, this is not a comfortable experience. Leaving aside that this crazy heavenly being is coming right for you, it’s using tongs to pick up the coal. This coal is so hot that even God’s representative is thinking “safety first” and using tongs to make sure he doesn’t burn his precious fingers or claws or whatever appendages seraphim have, but Isaiah is expected to take that burning fire directly on his lips, with nothing to protect him from the heat and fire of that holy coal. It must’ve hurt something awful, and yet through that fire and that pain, something changes in Isaiah – the seraphim tells him that his guilt is removed and his sins are forgiven. And that doesn’t materially change the situation that Isaiah finds himself in – he’s still in way over his head here, he’s still messing around with power far above his pay grade as a low level temple employee, but now that he’s experienced that fire, now that he’s endured that pain, now he’s not worried about his own inadequacy, his own weakness, his own frailty. Now, when God calls for a volunteer to be his messenger, his spokesperson to

bring his word to the people of Israel, now Isaiah steps forward and offers himself for the job – Here I am, send me. Isaiah came into the Temple that morning not expecting to meet God, not expecting to actually encounter the creator of the universe, but now that he has, now that he's come face to face with the Holy Holy Holy Lord God of Hosts, now that he's been purified by God's holy fire and his sins have been burned away, now Isaiah is ready to say yes to whatever happens next. Whatever unexpected challenges or surprises lay ahead, whatever obstacles might come up for him serving as God's messenger to the world around, there is nothing else that can be more surprising, more challenging, more unexpected than what he's already been through in the temple that day. Once you've come face-to-face with Almighty God and lived to tell the tale, what do you have to fear? What can the world do to you when you've stood in the presence of your creator and heard that voice ringing in your ears, felt that fire burning on your lips and in your heart? From this moment on, Isaiah is ready to dedicate the rest of his life to serving as God's messenger to the world around, ready to go anywhere he is sent, do whatever God calls him to do, because he knows now that the God of his ancestors is still at work in the world, the pillars of cloud and fire are still on the move, and now he expects to see God's presence in this world, not just in the temple but everywhere he goes.

And here we are today. We are God's people, gathered in God's house to worship and celebrate what God has done for us. We are God's priests, called to be God's representatives to the people around us,

ambassadors building bridges between God's kingdom and this broken world. We have been coming to this particular place for 64 years now, gathering here each and every Sunday to hear the story of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, to understand who we are in the light of Christ and his Holy Spirit with us now. And yet if we're being completely honest, I think sometimes when we gather here in God's house, to meet with our saviour and King, I think sometimes we're not really expecting God to actually show up. We're not really expecting God to be here, for this place to be filled with smoke and fire and burning seraphim and the throne of the Almighty King of Kings. It can be so easy to come in day after day, week after week, and hear the story and sing the songs, and then just go home, the same as we were before. And yet the same God who met with Isaiah in the Temple, who guided Israel with cloud and fire, who willingly laid down his life on the cross, who filled the apostles with wind and fire at Pentecost, the same God who worked through Tony and Gordon and Frances and Victor and so many other saints and servants over 64 years of ministry, that same God is here with us now. That same God speaks to us now. That same God is still calling to us, still asking us, WHOM SHALL I SEND? Who will be my messenger to the world around? Who will share my love and speak my word and spread the purifying fire of my Holy Spirit to this city, this community, this broken, beloved world? We are standing in God's presence today. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our guilt and sin have been taken away. We have been given unexpected

blessings, unexpected grace, and now that we know what God has done for us, now we can say Yes to the calling to go into the world and share those blessings with everyone around us, we can answer God's call and say, Here I am. Send Me. Because once you've come face-to-face with Almighty God and lived to tell the tale, what do you have to fear? What can the world do to you when you've stood in the presence of your creator and heard that voice ringing in your ears, felt that fire burning on your lips and in your heart? From this moment on, we are ready to dedicate the rest of our lives to serving as God's messengers to the world around, ready to go anywhere we are sent, to do whatever God calls us to do, because we know that the God of our ancestors is still at work in the world, the pillars of cloud and fire are still on the move, and now we expect to see God's presence in this world, not just in here in the church but everywhere we go. Today, may your eyes be opened to see God's presence in your life. May you feel God's fire burning on your lips and in your heart. And when God calls, may you answer with Isaiah: Here I am. Send me. Amen.