

Dear Friends,

Isaiah 6: 1-11

I wonder how people reacted when Isaiah of Jerusalem told them about his experience. One particular statement must have shocked them to the core. He said, "I saw the Lord". Everybody knew that no one could see God and live. And yet here was Isaiah, alive and kicking, telling everyone that he had done just that.

In his vision there is a mingling of the time bound and the eternal, the heavenly and earthly. He says that it happened in the year that King Uzziah died. The books say that was 742 BC. It's a specific moment in time and human history. For Isaiah, in that moment the veil is lifted and he is given a glimpse of eternity. He's also in the temple, a real building on earth, built by human hands. But in that very place, he sees heaven, God and some heavenly beings. The earthly and the heavenly are fused together.

It may be fair to say that God doesn't exactly fit in to these time bound, earthly surroundings. Isaiah says that God was high and lifted up and the edge of his cloak filled the temple. By human standards the temple was a large space, but it could only hold the very edge of God's being, just the fringe of his clothing. As Solomon said in a prayer when he was dedicating the temple "Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you. How much less this house which I have built".

In the same way our minds can only contain the tiniest fraction of the truth about God. All we know, all we've been able to glimpse, all the best books that have been written and the best sermons that have been preached are just the edge of God's cloak. We've only falteringly caught on to a half of a half of a little bit of what there is to know about God. As God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts". Our life now and for ever will be a never-ending ascension into God. Even eternity's too short to plumb the depths of God. There is always more to know, always deeper to go.

In Isaiah's vision, there are heavenly creatures with God who are described as seraphs. These seraphs are in the form of fiery serpents. I know, "Why did it have to be snakes?" Sorry, but that's what the books say they are. They have three sets of wings. With the first set they cover their eyes. This is surely for their own protection. God is so bright and glorious that even the heavenly creatures have to shield themselves from the full impact of the sight. If their heavenly eyes are unable to look directly at God how much more are our earthly eyes unable to take in the vision? With their second set of wings, they cover their feet. Isaiah is being a little shy here. He doesn't actually mean feet. You probably get the picture. With the third set of wings, they fly. Just what we need, flying fiery snakes.

The seraphs cry out in praise of God. Isaiah hears their words and wonders if he dares to open his lips and add his voice to the sound of the heavenly choir.

God bless you,

Tony