

What would you say is the most unfathomable thing about God? Mysteries that are beyond our ability to logically understand? I'll give you three choices. Would you say **A.) The Triune God**, that God is three distinct persons, but just one God? **B.) The dual nature of Christ**—that Jesus is both 100% God and 100% man simultaneously? **C.) The Real Presence**—that Jesus' true body and blood are really present with the bread and wine in Holy Communion? Take 30 seconds to discuss your answer with your neighbor.

Whichever you chose, I think you're wrong. There's a mystery of God that's even more unfathomable. I know that wasn't really fair because I didn't offer the correct answer as an option, but it's my sermon, so I can do what I want.

That's not to say your answers aren't unfathomable. I certainly can't logically explain the Triune God on Trinity Sunday. But there's something even more unfathomable about God. As we begin our new worship series, **The Word Works!** we'll see how God's Word works to give us **Faith in the Unfathomable.**

In our text, the prophet Isaiah shares a pretty unfathomable vision God gave him. He writes, ***"In the year that King Uzziah died (740 B.C.) I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple."*** In this incredible vision, Isaiah saw God himself seated on a throne in the temple, fully displaying his power and glory! But this wasn't the Temple in Jerusalem, which had no throne. Rather, Isaiah was glimpsing God's throne room in Heaven!

***"Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: with two wings 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."*** With each word, these angels were building new levels of glory to God with their temple-shaking hymn of praise. **"Holy, Holy, Holy"**—God isn't just good. He's perfect; holy! 3x holy in fact, signifying the infinite, unfathomable holiness of the Triune God. They call him the **"LORD"** denoting him as the faithful, covenant God who never fails to keep his promises. He's the **"LORD Almighty"**— the all-powerful King, ruling over all things. So infinitely glorious, that his glory can't be contained, filling the whole universe!

How did Isaiah react? Does he rejoice, uttering an astounded "Wow!" at this unfathomable vision? No, Isaiah despairingly cries out, ***"Woe to me! 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!"***

Isaiah was terrified. Why? Because he knew his sinfulness; his unworthiness; that a Holy God had every right to destroy him on the spot! As God himself had warned Moses, ***"No one may see me and live."***

So for Isaiah, each of the angels' words of praise was like a twist of a knife. He's the infinitely Holy God! And you're an infinitely sinful man. He's the perfectly faithful covenant Lord! And you're a sinner who repeatedly breaks your promises to God. He's the all-powerful God! You're a powerless human. Isaiah was understandably terrified!

Do we react differently in God's presence? "Well, if we were standing before God in Heaven and angels were flying around our heads, I bet we'd be terrified!"

But I don't just mean if we were standing before God in Heaven. I mean, do we react differently when we stand before God in worship? Do we show the same humility and reverence when God comes to us in Word and Sacrament? Or do you sometimes feel pretty apathetic and bored with it?

Isaiah was terrified because he recognized his sin made him completely unworthy to stand before our infinitely Holy God. Do we recognize our sin and unworthiness in the same way? We all know we're sinful, and that no one is perfect. But when you confessed your sins today, did you really feel the guilt of your sin? Or did you just say the words without much thought because that's what's printed? If we truly understand how unworthy our sin makes us to stand before an infinitely holy God, we can't be in God's presence with apathy or boredom any more than Isaiah could have.

The problem is, we're really good at convincing ourselves we're really not that sinful. In our minds, we downplay our guilt with rationalizations like, "Well, I'm a Christian." "Well, I go to church." "Well, I go to Mount Olive School, or FVL." "Well, I send my kids to Christian schools." "Well, my sins aren't the really bad ones." "Well, I sin, but look at that guy!" And when we convince ourselves, "I'm not that bad," then standing in God's presence in worship, Word, and Sacrament, are met with shoulder shrugs and "mehs."

But if you catch yourself thinking, "I'm not that bad," I invite you to try this exercise. For the next three days, carry a notebook with you, or make a note on your phone. Every time you break one of God's commandments—every sinful thought, word, or action—the sinful things you do, or the good things you fail to do—be honest and mark a tally. Keep track of how often you sin during those three days, and see if you still think, "I'm not that bad." But you also have to acknowledge that beyond the sins you marked, there are others you didn't even realize you committed.

The comparison game doesn't work either. Because maybe you've never sexually assaulted someone, but if the lustful thoughts in your mind took action, would you be guilty? You've never shot up a school or office, but have you ever wished harm on another student or teacher, or co-worker or boss? Maybe you've never been arrested, but is that only because you never got caught?

Even though we create one, God doesn't have a hierarchy of sin. So, even if we think our sins are "small," God sees all sin the same. And each sin makes us completely unworthy to stand before our infinitely holy God. Even if there's only one tally on your sin sheet, ***"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*** On our own, we can do nothing but cry out with Isaiah, "I am ruined! For I'm a person of unclean lips." We can't stand before God's holiness, because we are completely unholy in every way.

Being reminded of our sinful unworthiness isn't fun. But we need those reminders. To fully grasp the most unfathomable thing about God, we need to understand how sinful we truly are.

It reminds me of my vicar year, which is like a pastor internship. The pastor who mentored me critiqued each of my sermons. As I preached, he'd take notes on a sheet of yellow lined paper. Then after the service, he'd fold it up and hand it to me without another word. Let's just say, he wasn't an easy grader. Many Sundays, I felt like I'd preached a great sermon, like I was "pretty good." At least that's what the nice little old ladies told me. But his notes broke down all my flaws and weaknesses. At first, I hated it. But I realized it's what I needed to hear. Had he just wrote, "You're really great!" on all those critiques, I would have stopped working hard. People's nice comments wouldn't have meant anything. But when you realize you're flawed and imperfect, it makes genuine praise unfathomably more meaningful. When I occasionally unfolded a critique with positive feedback, I felt genuine joy I wouldn't have felt if I was unaware of my weaknesses.

You might say that's what happened with Isaiah too. As Isaiah awaited destruction from the Holy God for his sins, he recounts, ***"Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand... With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'"***

And there, we see the most unfathomable aspect of God. His grace! The infinitely Holy God, who cannot dwell with sin, doesn't get rid of sin by destroying the sinner, but by removing the sin from the sinner. Instead of annihilation for sin, he atones from sin.

The angel took the burning coal from the altar, where sacrifices were made to atone for the Israelites' sins. God is assuring Isaiah that through the ultimate sacrificial death of the promised Messiah, the guilt of the world's sin would be taken away, and every sinful thought, word, and deed would be atoned for.

Even more unfathomable than a three-in-one God, is a God who willingly suffers hell in order to save not his friends, but his worst enemies. While the gods of every other religion demand works in order to earn forgiveness, the Triune God of Christianity alone crosses the divide and comes to mankind. God doesn't demand that Isaiah drag himself to God's feet and beg for forgiveness. Rather, God brings forgiveness to him! That is unfathomable grace.

In light of that unfathomable grace, everything changed for Isaiah. The terrified sinner awaiting destruction becomes the purified saint, awaiting direction. As the Triune God takes council within himself (notice, "**Whom shall I send?**") And "**who will go for us?**") Isaiah immediately volunteers, "**Here am I. Send me!**"

It wasn't a burning coal that cleansed Isaiah. It was the Spirit, working through God's Word and promises to strengthen Isaiah's faith in God's unfathomable grace. Isaiah could stand boldly before the infinitely Holy Lord, because as he wrote 47 chapters later, "**The LORD has laid on [Christ] the iniquity of us all.**"

Did you realize we sing a song based on these angels' "Holy, Holy, Holy" song of praise as part of our liturgy? It's called the Sanctus. Do you know when we sing it? Before communion, where our Triune God puts, not a burning coal, but our Savior's body and blood on our lips, to assure us that our guilt is gone and our sins are atoned for. To remind us that God's unfathomable grace is ours too!

And if God can carry out the most unfathomable grace and show his limitless love in saving undeserving sinners like us, then why would we try to limit the Almighty God by trying to force him into tidy human boxes of reason and logic? If we trust in God's unfathomable grace, then we can trust in those other unfathomable aspects of God too. Take comfort in that! It simply means that our unfathomable God is unfathomably more powerful and holy than we are! And that's a good thing!

Do you know what that means? It means you can take that sheet of paper with your sin tallied on it, and throw it in a bonfire. It means delete that note on your phone. Because of God's unfathomable grace, those sins are gone. Yes, you are infinitely sinful, but God is infinitely gracious! It's unbelievable. But we believe it, because God's Word works.