

“Totally Awesome!”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 30, 2021 – Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 6:1-8; John 3:1-17

When I was a much younger person, one of the phrases that was commonly used in conversation by my friends and me was this wonderful expression to describe something delightful: “Like, totally awesome, dude!” I don’t remember the time I last actually used that phrase; however, I admit that I probably still use the word awesome a little too casually, using it to describe something that is merely good way too often. Things that produce a sense of awe in us are not necessarily things that are good or nice or neat or cool, but things that are grand and breath-taking. And things that are *totally* awesome are *completely* enrapturing and are able to change our whole worldview.

Perhaps you’ve experienced this kind of enrapturing awe when experiencing the natural world around you, such as when standing on the rim of Arizona’s Grand Canyon and gazing out at the vast, colorful expanse below; or struggling to stand when facing the mighty winds high atop Mount Washington in New Hampshire; or being at a rugged stretch of Maine’s coastline and being amazed and humbled by the great waves that roll in and crash against the unflinching granite rocks.

Perhaps you’ve experienced this kind of awe when in church. It used to be that many people experienced awe most regularly when they gathered in churches, with their soaring ceilings and grand halls filled with glorious sounds, sights, and smells. Many of us still sense awe when we are in beautiful worship spaces or when hearing a grand organ playing the gorgeous chords of a Bach fugue or a powerful hymn like “God of Our Fathers,” which Joyce will be playing later this morning as our postlude.

Today's reading from the book of Isaiah describes such an awe-inspiring worship experience. We read of the prophet Isaiah being given a vision from God of a grand, heavenly throne room, with God seated upon a high and lofty throne, surrounded by seraphim, which were incredible, angelic winged cobras, that shout out praises to God with mighty, ground-shaking voices. The lowly mortal Isaiah stood before the heavenly court, the seat of power for all the universe, and was *totally* in awe; he was also terrified at this glimpse of the almighty, exclaiming, "Woe is me! I am lost!" For Isaiah knew, like the seraphim who protected themselves by covering their eyes, that he was unholy and unworthy to be in the holiest of places in the presence of the Holy One. And yet, while he was just a lost, lowly creature of the earth, a person, like all other people, with unclean lips, the prophet was given this totally awesome glimpse of the divine and was commissioned by God to offer God's pure words to a people of unclean lips.

In this story of the calling of Isaiah, we read of God's transcendence, that is that God is beyond us, God is holy, God is separate. On this Trinity Sunday, we also pay attention to God's imminence, that is that God is present and among us. In Christ, God came to us and experienced humanness, living among people with unclean lips and unclean hearts, ultimately having his body broken by broken, sinful people. In the Holy Spirit, God remains with us, is around us and even within us, offering us the totally awesome experience of being in the presence of the Divine, cleansing our own lips, and calling and enabling us to share God's pure word with the world.

Our experience of God is awesome and changes us. As Jesus told Nicodemus in our gospel reading, we can and must be born again, made new in spirit and moved by God's Wind to go wherever God calls us to go, filled with God's Holy Breath to speak whatever words God calls us to speak. As followers of Christ, we practice the way of Jesus,

loving God and loving our neighbor, calling for justice, working to bring peace to people's bodies and minds. As we do so, we find ourselves being renewed on our own journeys, with eternal, saving life welling up within us even as we travel upon the face this earth. And we bring renewal to the world, working to replace age-old systems where people practice violence by exploiting and taking from one another with ways of living as individuals and societies that allow all to enjoy the blessings of life equally. If we can let God work through us to bring about a rebirth of the world, that it might become more just and loving, that truly would be totally awesome.

So let's be about this work of making the world more awesome, filling it with more with amazing, enrapturing beauty as we love one another sacrificially as taught by Christ. Let's commit ourselves to being more awesome, becoming transformed by God's Spirit as we offer ourselves to be cleaned by God more and more each day and allow ourselves to be used by God as we breathe in deeply God's presence and breathe out with boldness God's life-giving message. Let's let go of the unawesome ways of destruction and embrace the truly awesome ways of creation and be the Creator's workers who are busy at making the world anew. Together, dear friends, let's be totally awesome! Amen.