

Year C*Epiphany 5*2010*All Fall Down!
Rick Lawler

Isaiah falls down in response to the sudden invasion of God into the Temple and into Isaiah's mind and heart.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots^a on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"¹

In many paintings, icons, and stained glass renderings of this important moment, Isaiah falls down on his knees. God arrives and Isaiah goes down.

Peter falls down too. When God shows up in Jesus. . .in a boat. . . out on the water.

And they came and filled both boats with fish, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"²

Paul doesn't fall down in today's reading but he did once and he refers to the day Jesus knocked him right on his keester when he says, **Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.**³

He's talking about the day he was headed for Damascus to arrest Christians for worshipping Jesus. As the story goes in the Acts of the Apostles; **Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them**

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

¹*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Is 6:1-5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

²*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 5:7-9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

³*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Co 15:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. Paul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”⁴

I want to relearn how to fall down before the Lord.

I told you months ago how standing is really the preferred posture for praise in the current Book of Common Prayer and in the ancient life of the Church. I told you how standing emphasized God’s work of making us “worthy to stand before him” as one of our Eucharistic Prayers (Prayer B) says. I’m all over that. Many of you even listened to me and used the end of Pentecost as a time of experimenting and stood until Advent.

I decided to stand through worship when I have an option through Christmas and Epiphany which are joyous seasons. I think I’ll also stand when Easter comes which is the joyous season above all; the season of resurrection when God raises us up from sin and despair in this life and raises us from the dead when this life is over.

But I can’t wait for Lent when I get to fall down on my knees and worship the Lord.

As we sing sometimes in a wonderful African-American spiritual,
*Let us break bread together on our knees; when I fall on my knees,
with my face to the rising sun, o Lord, have mercy on me.*

*Let us drink wine together on our knees; when I fill on my knees,
with my face to the rising sun, o Lord, have mercy on me.*

*Let us praise God together on our knees; when I fall on my knees,
with my face to the rising sun, o Lord, have mercy on me.*

I think falling on our knees has gotten a little bit of a bum wrap in this current Book of Common Prayer. It is interpreted as mostly penitential, a posture for confessing sins and say we’re sorry and it is a good posture for that. Sorrow for sin has it’s place in Isaiah, Peter, and Paul this morning. Each one was acutely aware of his limitations, faults, and sins.

But falling down on our knees is also a response of praise and gratitude before an awesome and compassionate God.

Praising God is so integral to who we are and what we do at St. Mary’s.

⁴*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ac 9:1-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Praising God on a Sunday morning acknowledges so much:
life as mystery,
God as good,
our own limitations and dependence on a power greater than ourselves.

When we make this simple act of coming to worship on a Sunday morning we are doing a radical thing.

We're admitting we don't have all the answers and must stay humbly oriented to reality.

We're acknowledging that we need help, each other's help, and the help of our mothers and fathers in the faith.

We're carving out a time, a moment in the week, when we orient ourselves, together around a table, around a common meal, sharing a common prayer.

Prayer and praise are our life together.

The priest/poet George Herbert wrote a famous poem called *Prayer* which celebrates beautifully what our work is. In it he simply lists 14 clauses each describing a dimension of the mystery of the Church's prayer.

*Prayer the church's banquet, angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth
Engine against th' Almighty, sinnr's tow'r,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in the ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood.*

These words hold the mystery of praise in everything we are:
breath and birth, soul and heart, heaven and earth, hearing and fearing,
softness, peace, joy, love, and bliss,
but also struggle, repentance, pilgrimage and blood.

We offer all we are to God in Sunday praise.
We don't check any experience,
any joy,

any challenge at the door.

When we “lift our hearts to the Lord” we lift the whole of our lives
We humbly admit God can be praised always in everything.

What a great delight it is to come together and praise the Mystery.

Our bodies are here. Whether we stand or kneel this is the morning our bodies
come together to honor and worship the Trinity. If we do not bend our knees we
surely “bend the knees of our hearts”.

To praise the mystery of God;
it’s why we’re here.
It’s why we are.