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*The Flaming Lips*  
 Isaiah 6:1-8

Last week, scientists announced that they'd found a feathered dinosaur tail, perfectly preserved, in a large piece of amber. The tail was discovered by a jeweler, working with amber pulled from a mine in Myanmar. It is the first specimen to demonstrate what the fossil record indicated was true – that 150 million years ago, some dinosaurs had feathers! It's amazing, really. Think of it: in the Mesozoic period, a little dinosaur the size of a sparrow with a long thin tail was looking for food and got its tail stuck, where it was preserved for 99 million years. 99 million years! A long time ago.

It's a good time to think about time, because this is a season of endings – graduations, the end of the school year. It's also a time of beginnings – the start of summer, and for our church, the beginning of an intensive time of searching and seeking to call our next pastor, as the job description went live in the PCUSA's matching system this week. It's like online dating between churches and pastors.

Time flies doesn't it? Baby Gillian turned one last weekend. Shannon retired 6 months ago, and Meg's lived here for 7. First Light turned 20 years old. Time flies.

King Uzziah died more than 2700 years ago, after reigning for more than fifty years. In a time when life expectancy was around 35-40 years old, to rule for more than fifty years was quite an accomplishment. Many were born and died while Uzziah was on the throne of Judah, steering the nation of Israel to unmatched affluence, stability, and power.

In the year he died, a prophet named Isaiah had a vision of God, high and lofty. In the prophet's vision, God is so massive that just the hem of his robe filled the temple. God's attendants, the seraphs, speak with sounds that shake the foundations of the room, fill it with smoke, and cause the prophet to tremble. The seraphs are mythical creatures like griffons who roar decrees on God's behalf. And even they shield their eyes from looking at God. Confronted by this vision of God as King, Isaiah is struck by a sense of inadequacy – he's unclean, unworthy to be in God's holy presence.

And so a seraph takes a pair of tongs in one of its six scary sacred hands and touches it to Isaiah's lips, cleansing him, making it so that when the prophet hears God ask, "Who will go for us? Whom shall we send?" through the smoke and the sound of the rumbling earth and the singing seraphs and the smell of his own charred flesh, with his newly purified flaming lips<sup>1</sup>, Isaiah says, "*I will go. Send me.*"

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<sup>1</sup> In 1983, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, a band was formed by this name. It was not, sadly, a reference to the prophet Isaiah. However, in 2002, the band released an album titled, *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*, which is a nice bridge to think about outer space.

Right now, there are two spacecraft travelling through interstellar space, hurtling away from earth at 35,000 mph as they have for the past 39 years. They are called the Voyager 1 and 2, and they have travelled farther than any other human made object in history. Both crafts carry something incredible: a time capsule of sorts designed to convey what life on earth is like to any aliens it may encounter. The time capsule is in the form of a golden record that will last for 100 million years... long after the sun has burned our planet into oblivion or the climate or an asteroid or a nuclear bomb has cooked us into extinction just like that feathered dinosaur, whichever comes first.

The golden record contains photos and data, as well as greetings in fifty-five languages, sounds from nature like a rushing river, and the song of a humpbacked whale. It has the sound of a mother's first words to her newborn baby, Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> symphony, Chuck Berry's "Johnny B Goode", a kiss.

What a project. The golden record on the Voyager spacecraft is a shot into the dark, in the hope that someone or something else is out there. In the hope that if intelligent life exists, it will be curious, just as we are, and will want to know who and how we were or are.

Before the Voyager left our solar system and flew out of range of radio transmission, it turned around and pointed its cameras back at Earth and took a photo. Our planet is just a tiny speck, a pale blue dot in the midst of a shining galaxy of stars. One pale blue dot! Puts things in perspective.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on the throne, high and lofty, and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

How can we possibly comprehend the creator of the universe?

How can our finite minds and limited language give voice to infinity? Can we really believe that God – immortal, omnipotent, all powerful – God is concerned with what happens on this tiny blue dot in the midst of a sea of stars? Not only that, but God cares for us? God speaks to us? God calls us? God works through us?

God, who existed before the feathered dinosaur got stuck in sap 99 million years ago; God, who is farther than the farthest reaches of space; God, who spoke the world into being and called to Isaiah the year that King Uzziah died; God, who ever was and is and ever will be – deigns to bother with us?

How can we believe that? Could it possibly be true?

We can, and we do – because we have this testimony from Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and Amos; we have the stories of Ruth and Elizabeth, Priscilla and the letters from Paul. We believe that God is concerned with us because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

The revelation of Jesus, the testimony of our ancestors, and our own experience of the Holy Spirit tell us that not only is God real, but that God cares for us, calling us to love one another, and to work together to build a just and loving world.

This story of Isaiah's experience in the throne room of God is strange and otherworldly, but the elements of the story are mirrored in our worship service. His vision begins with praise, moves to an acknowledgment of his brokenness and confession, then forgiveness. It ends with God's calling and commissioning the servant to take action. Take away the smoke and the seraphs and the terror, and we can see the call of Isaiah reflected not only in our service of worship but also in our sacrament of baptism. In baptism, we offer praise to God, we acknowledge and confess our need for God's grace. We are washed clean, and recommit ourselves to following God's call.

If we were to continue reading, we'd see that God's charge to Isaiah is a difficult one. God instructs Isaiah to prophesy to people who will not listen; who are willfully blind to the world around them, who will never understand God's intentions for them, and therefore will never be healed. Ugh.

Each Sunday we enact and embody this ritual – praise, confession, forgiveness, proclamation, and call. But on this Trinity Sunday, it astounds me to step back and consider that our infinite and eternal God – is the same God who promises to count every hair on our heads; God who is as close as our very breath. And so what we do here – creating space and dedicating time to consider the universe, the one who created it, and our place in it, then listening to what God might be calling us to next – what could be more important than that? Even and especially if God is calling us, like Isaiah, to speak truth that is hard to hear in our particular time and place, truth that might make our lips burn if we have the courage to say it.

In the face of children separated from parents seeking to migrate to the US without papers – God calls us to speak truth, like we find in the book of Deuteronomy, that God is impartial and executes justice for the orphan and the widow, loves strangers, and provides them with food and clothing; so we shall also love strangers, for we were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Truth that we are created in the image of God, beautiful and sacred. What truth are you called to speak this day?

What is the truth to which our congregation testifies? If we made a golden record for this community, what would you put on it? what is the truth to which we witness? I think we'd hear the bells of the carillon playing Lift Every Voice and Sing. The organ playing the doxology as it does every Sunday, the choir singing the Hallelujah Chorus, and Jeff Hairrell's voice, a capella, singing Were You There. We'd have to record Gloria Watts introducing herself and asking for someone's name, and Jonathan Sexton teaching the acolytes how to light the candles, and Weesa Matthews saying, Oh, I'm just so glad to know you, welcome! And Kandi saying, *welcome to First Presbyterian Church, a home*

*in the heart of the city.* We'd hear Sherri Nielson telling the story of building First Light, and Shannon calling out "God is Good" and the congregation's reply – All the time. Maybe Shannon singing some Kris Kristofferson, too.

I'm sure you can think of other things as well. A call for welcome, for inclusion, for love and responsible lending, and affordable housing, and racial justice and liberation. The golden record testifies to what the seraphs said, too: *holy, holy, holy*. All of this, all of you – all of our world – is holy. Creation reflects the beauty of the creator and gives glory to God. And though the time between then and now, from Uzziah's reign to this hiccup of Trump is but a blink of an eye to our infinite God, the gift of the Trinity is that God is made known to us and knows us in and through each fleeting moment. In the endings and beginnings, our waking up and our lying down, through science and religion both... if only we have the courage and the wisdom to look, and to listen. Thanks be to God.