

*A people of  
unclean lips*

# Bird's Eye View

*"Woe to me!" I cried. "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."*

*Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."*

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"* (Isaiah 6 v 5-8)

As a family, we tend to find going to church whilst on holiday a bit of a challenge. As well as it being a "busman's holiday", the logistics of getting to an unfamiliar church at the right time AND appropriately dressed often leave us in a less than appropriate frame of mind for worship. However, during our recent break in London, despite going the wrong way around the block, we managed to get into Evensong. The natives were friendly, the music was familiar and it felt like God, too, had showed up, particularly when He underlined the readings and fleshed out His message in the sermon.

The reading from the Old Testament was Isaiah's vision of God enthroned from Chapter 6. Isaiah's response to seeing God was to realise God's holiness – and that he was not good enough to be in the presence of that awesome, holy being. What is interesting, I think, is that Isaiah was ONLY concerned about the sins he had committed with his MOUTH. Also, that he was aware that his was not the only sin of this kind, Isaiah also lived among a 'people of unclean lips'.

We use our mouths to eat and speak (and drink and smoke!). I guess the reference to unclean lips could refer to the equivalent of chocolate cake crumbs in Isaiah's beard - the commands in the Bible do prohibit gluttony and the like, but the usual interpretation of this verse is that it regards the sins Isaiah & co had done through what they SAID.

Sinning through what you say is hard to avoid. The Bible gives us plenty of 'commands' regarding spoken sin. If you check out the ten commandments there are two which specifically prohibit speaking sins – do not take the Lord's

name in vain and do not give false witness or lie. Speaking would definitely be involved in breaking some of the other commandments - it is hard to imagine setting up a false idol with out speaking, or committing adultery in silence! Proverbs is full of instructions regarding what we say. Both Matthew and Luke wrote 'out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks' and most of the book of James is a treatise on controlling the tongue.

However, it is not all bad news. God sends a seraph with a hot coal to touch Isaiah's lips... and his sin is FORGIVEN and ATONED for. And the newly forgiven Isaiah volunteers to be sent to pass God's message to the people.

It is much easier to remember the discouraging words you hear than encouragement. It is easier to complain about our situation than to be grateful. It is easier to bring God a list of please do's than to thank Him and praise him for what he has done. We are left fragile and disconcerted at best and angry, cursing and 'mouthing' off or swearing at worst as a result of the sin of our mouths and that of others.

January is a time of new year's resolutions – let us be aware of our 'unclean lips' and strive to NOT be 'a people of unclean lips'.

As I write this, there is a layer of ice between 4 and 6 inches thick over most of Polmont. The snow and ice make the world look and sound and smell different and life is harder. It is slippery to walk and drive on and we are more careful as we go from place to place. The birds, wild life and domestic animals are struggling to eat and move around. We are all longing for the thaw!

It is a bit like our hearts and minds – we all have 'unclean lips' and we all have sinned. We carry the wounds of the words others have said and these wounds have iced over our hearts and minds. We struggle to move around and find what we need to survive. Our dealings with each other are tricky and we run the risk of slipping up on our own words, or allowing the words of others to be a stumbling block to us.

My prayer is that the seraph will bring a hot coal to Polmont, clean our lips, melt the ice in our streets and hearts, and like Isaiah, let us volunteer to be 'sent' with His message!

*With all love  
Tracey O'Brien*