

People do dumb and annoying things, especially when they're far from home and think no one's watching. Perhaps you've been on a vacation, traveling abroad on some exotic island, only to have the serenity of your surroundings interrupted by the sound of a clearly inebriated vacationer barking orders at locals, insisting they point him back to the cruise ship. Maybe you've heard stories about coworkers who use business travel as a chance to act like coeds on spring break.

Of course, everyone's had the cringe-inducing experience of watching a tourist halt a sidewalk of commuters as they pause to snap a picture, or as they attempt to communicate with a local, not by humbly attempting the local language, but by condescendingly shouting at them. A survey conducted by a travel company called, Triposo, confirms what so many of us already know: Terrible tourist behavior abounds. For example, 25 percent of respondents admitted to having a one-night stand while traveling abroad. Another 15 percent admitted to buying drugs while traveling. For some reason, however, the survey didn't ask tourists whether they wear fanny packs while on vacation. But, no doubt, the numbers would have been staggering.

It's easy for us to pick on the rude and, sometimes, wild behavior of tourists -- that is, until the focus shifts to us; and our own annoying, downright destructive behavior. An in depth read through of Isaiah's 66 chapters makes it abundantly clear that God is none-too-pleased with the **arrogant** and **irreverent** actions of his people. We could argue that we're all terrible tourists in God's world, doing the same insensitive and self-absorbed things that others do that frustrate us to no end. Indeed, we all do dumb and annoying things on occasion, when we think that no one is watching. But God is!

Let's examine ourselves for a moment. The Propheet Isaiah, in our first lesson this morning, reflects on the historic, ongoing patterns of sin in the lives of God's people. It might benefit us to take a quick gander at verse 6, where he uses **four powerful images** to illustrate what we look like from God's perspective! Fair warning, Isaiah's list contains a lot of law, and not so much grace! But perhaps during the season of Advent it might do us some good to reflect a little bit more on the law, and on our own need for repentance as we prepare for the coming of Jesus!

According to God's prophet, the **Number 1 Thing that Sets God Off is that** we have "become like one who is unclean." We dive into sin and drag

others along for the ride. God puts us on this planet to live a life of love, and often times we choose to roll around in the dirt instead. We think to ourselves, "God must love me. God *has* to love me. That's what God does." Perhaps we don't think of ourselves as being very bad. "Sin" is such a harsh word. After all, we try our best to follow the 10 Commandments. We even do pretty well avoiding the Seven Deadly Sins (wrath, avarice, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony) all of these can be troublesome -- okay, maybe we *don't* do so well with the Seven Deadly Sins.

But it is true that, generally, we're not as likely to be tempted by the Big Three -- sex, drugs and rock and roll -- as we are by things much more mundane. A recent survey shows that the "sins" we really have trouble with are: procrastination, overeating, and spending too much time on social media. God doesn't like it when we sin and apparently we don't seem to care about it. Whether it is lust or envy, sloth or self-righteousness, anger or wrath -- God doesn't like it when we become "like one who is unclean."

This leads us to the **2nd Thing that Really Irks God off:** We offer "righteous deeds that are like a polluted garment." Translation: We walk around arrogantly overestimating the little bit of goodness we do display, while

lacking any self-awareness of how offensive, overall, we are to our Lord the Almighty. It's like a tourist, traveling abroad, who gets into arguments about how superior his or her country is to the host country in which he or she is traveling. The arrogant tourist! That's kind of what we seem like to God, when we suggest that our so-called righteous deeds have merit.

Now, the third thing that Annoys God is: that we "fade like a leaf."

Our spirituality, our love for God, is quick to become brittle and lifeless. A temptation hits us, a struggle emerges, and we are quick to point our fingers at God in accusation, or cry out that we're spiritually exasperated.

Lastly, the Number 4 Obnoxious Thing God isn't very fond of is that:

we are taken away like "the wind." We don't just dabble in dark behavior; we major in it! Sin has such a stronghold on our hearts, that it can quickly and destructively pull us into the deep-end until we find ourselves drowning in despair, feeling we're too far gone to lay hold of God's mercies. It's like the tourist who insists that when *he* travels abroad he'll totally blend in -- only to find himself posing as if he's holding up the Leaning Tower of Pisa, unfolding a massive map in the middle of a busy sidewalk, and eating at McDonalds instead of enjoying the local fare. Despite his best efforts he's not just an

annoying tourist, he is every stereotype rolled into one: a camera-toting and Hawaiian-shirt-wearing clueless individual.

The big question that needs to be answered then is this: **Why is it that we act this way?** Why is it that God's own people constantly rebel against God's goodness? Why is it that we act like entitled fools, ignorant of how our lives offend his glory? Is it enough to blame it simply on "sin?" Or is that too generic? Has that word lost its power with us?

Jumping back to the annoying tourist analogy. What is it that allows a human being to treat another human being's hometown as a personal, self-indulgent playground? What allows one person to act indifferent, and unaware, of how one's boorish behavior is affecting others?

The answer is simply: **The two lack a relationship!** The tourist sees the native as a foreigner to take a picture of, and not as a neighbor to empathize with. That same lack of relationship, that lack of understanding and empathy, allows the native to roll his eyes and huff with disdain at every visitor, who complains that the subway is dirty or the city is too crowded. But think how different things are among those who know each other. Sure, we still get

annoyed, and we still act like fools, but when there's a relationship, there's also at least a little consideration of how our actions may affect others.

We tend to not always take what we know about another person's preferences and annoyances into account. On the flipside, when our spouse, coworker, or sibling steps on our toes, there tends to be at least a small measure of grace, and mercy thrown the offender's way. We are much more likely than to do what Paul exhorts us to do in 1 Corinthians 13: "Put the best construction on everything." Is not the same issue at the heart of Israel's incessant rebellion against God?

And what about us, today? When we sin do, we not cast aside our relationship -- our identity -- as sons and daughters, insisting instead to be seen as independent operators? We regularly divorce ourselves from our relationship with God, along with the accountability it provides, choosing to see God as a foreigner, who doesn't understand us, instead of seeing God as our Creator, as our primary and most important neighbor. So we delight in sin in front of God's face. We use God's world as our self-indulgent playground. And we assume God finds it cute. Or we believe God doesn't understand.

Isaiah clearly grasps that it is the ignorance of relationship that is the issue, which is why in verse 8 -- even after so vividly outlining our rebellion -- he writes, "But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." In other words he says, "Treat us not as foreigners. Give us the grace that only family gets." And that is what repentance is, isn't it? It's asking God not to get exasperated with us, not to judge us for our jerky attitudes, or blog about our boorish behavior in his Book of Life. It's asking God not to treat us as the anonymous tourist we've been pretending to be, but instead to give us the extra measure of his grace that he freely and willingly offers to all people of this world who would seek to be a part of his family.

And how does God respond to that request? When God finally did "rend the heavens and come down" as Isaiah requested, what did the obtuse and annoying tourists, God's people receive? They received Jesus. They received God in the flesh touring the world. They saw God in Christ suffering on a cross. In short, they were forgiven, made new.

And that's extremely good news for every "terrible tourist." In Christ, we can always come home. We can come home to the arms of God, who will not

treat us as our SINS deserve, who will not treat us as the smug, indulgent and unaccountable out-of-towners that we so often act like. Instead, God treats us like sons and daughters. God does not wish us gone, rather he gives us his grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love as he remembers the healed relationship we now have with Him on account of Christ. And thanks be to God for that!

Amen.