

The Holy Trinity 30 May 2021

Isaiah 6:1-8 / Psalm 29 / Romans 8:12-17 / John 3:1-17

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Today is Holy Trinity, the Sunday we try to understand one of the deep mysteries of the church, the God who is both One-in-Three and Three-in-One. And maybe the short answer to that exercise is that no one understands it; even Saint Augustine said it was beyond him.

We can see we're saying something about who God is, and that there's community in God, that God is about relationship. One metaphor for being three-in-one is a Greek word, "perichoresis," which means "dancing in a circle." Like in the hymn some of us may know, Come Join the Dance of Trinity. We may not distinguish the three persons one from the others, yet we can't know God without knowing all three.

This year's Holy Trinity Sunday not only falls on Memorial Day weekend, but it comes with three really interesting characters in our readings from the Hebrew Scriptures, the letters of Saint Paul, and the Evangelists.

So that may be a good place to start. Our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures is from an early chapter in Isaiah, and in the prophetic books the prophets show their credentials by telling how they came to be called as prophets.

Isaiah has a great call story! He lives in troubled times (sound familiar?) and there are political power plays going on after the death of the king. While Isaiah's in the temple, which is filled with incense smoke, he's overcome by his own human frailty compared to the holiness and power of God. He has a fantastic vision of being in the presence of God who is on a throne, attended by supernatural beings, seraphs with three pairs of wings each, who sing and "have a fiery nature." Pretty scary stuff.

God's glory fills the earth, and Isaiah feels completely unworthy. After one of the seraphs offers him absolution by purifying him of his guilt, when the Lord asks who the Lord shall send, Isaiah says, "Here am I; send me!" And his authority as a prophet is established, a channel for God's word in difficult times.

In the book of Romans, Saint Paul tells the church in Rome, where there's tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians, that Christ's death has justified them all. And Paul describes a God who wants to be on familiar terms, to be called Abba, Papa. And we're not just God's children, but also God's heirs; and not just heirs, but co-heirs with

Christ. God considers us co-heirs, equal inheritors of what God has to give, with God's only begotten Son.

Because of this astonishing promise, Paul calls us to be unafraid of the future, and into the life of those adopted by God and invited into the full measure of God's blessings, in relationship with the Triune God and other believers. To be who we already are in Christ.

And in the gospel reading we're introduced to Nicodemus. In a passage that contains that famous Bible verse "For God so loved the world..." we meet a man who's curious about Jesus, and who Saint John writes about three different times during his Gospel.

A teacher and a Pharisee, Nicodemus is also a seeker. So he's a leader and a wise man, one who humbly comes to Jesus, is polite to him, maybe even wants to believe, but who's struggling. He affirms Jesus' connection to God, but as soon as Jesus starts talking about being born again from above, Nicodemus is confused, either with the metaphor or its implications. He wants to understand about this material and spiritual birth and belonging.

Jesus invites Nicodemus to imagine that through our life in the Spirit we can be born anew, born from above as God's children so precious that God is willing to give God's own Son to show us how much God loves us.

Today's reading is Nicodemus' main appearance in the Gospel of Saint John. We see him again in Chapter 7, reminding his colleagues that under the law, they shouldn't judge Jesus before giving him a trial. And gets rebuked for saying so. The final time Nicodemus appears is after Jesus' crucifixion, when he accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to retrieve and bury the body of Jesus. Once again, this isn't overt standing up for his faith, but by his actions Nicodemus declares allegiance to someone who's just been executed for a capital offense.

So we see Nicodemus, this side character, as he grows in faith. At first, in today's reading, he's questioning and confused. Then he invites others to slow down their judgment, and finally risks publicly honoring the one who's just been executed.

Nicodemus' faith takes time.

For some of us, perhaps coming to faith was easy and strong and they've rarely experienced doubt. That's wonderful. But for others of us, maybe many of us, faith comes gradually - two steps forward and one step back. Perhaps sometimes things seem crystal clear and other times confusing. Or more like questions than affirmations.

Nicodemus is a saint in the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches because of the loyalty he showed to Jesus. Maybe he should be the saint of all with uneasy or restless faith, who keep questioning, who want to believe and understand, to at least to believe.

Today's gospel reading may teach us about Nicodemus and about God. We see that God is patient and doesn't give up. The God who works in and through Nicodemus across three years and 17 chapters in Saint John's Gospel is going to keep working in and on and through us too, no matter how long it takes.

At the heart of the mystery of the Trinity is that we can't understand God without talking about relationship. God's so full of love there has to be a way of talking about that love in and through deep relationships.

The Trinity shows us that from the very beginning of time, the power of love at the heart of God can only be understood - dimly - by imagining love that is shared. God shares love in creating the world, then shares love through a series of covenants, and finally and above all shares love in sending God's own Son to us, as the Spirit bears witness to God's love.

And the reality of the Triune God is completed by God's profound love that draws *us* into relationship, with God, with each other, with all of creation.

What would it mean for us to live knowing we are God's beloved children, adopted and chosen, and named co-heirs with Christ? What difference does it make to our life *here and now* to know we are unconditionally loved, are of immeasurable value to God? That no matter what we do, or is done to us, or wherever we go, God always loves and cares about us?

Maybe we struggle to connect our faith to our daily lives because we don't take God's promises seriously enough. So, knowing we are all born anew through the Spirit and declared co-heirs with Christ, we might think this week about how our relationships, and challenges, and decisions may look *knowing* we have God's love and promises. That the Creator and Sustainer of the universe has our backs.

Is there a tie to the Triune God? Yes. That the Holy Trinity defies explanation; that the Holy Trinity calls for less explaining and more experiencing. We don't have to understand the triune God to be part of, and witness to, the church that is created, redeemed, and sustained by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.