

Holy Trinity- May 30, 2021 (Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 12:12-17; John 3: 1-17)

Friday was a very strange day for Linda and me. I was getting ready to write this sermon but needed to check on a quotation attributed to Philipp Melanchthon, friend and colleague of Martin Luther. Just as I clicked on a heading my computer was attacked by a virus which ended up turning my computer inside out. Was this a warning? How did that Lutheran website know I was a Presbyterian? So forgive me if I am a little tentative this morning!

As I recall the story, Melanchthon was on his death bed with family gathered around praying for him. Suddenly, his eyes flickered and there appeared a smile on his face. A daughter went near and asked, “What is happening? What do you want to say? Melanchthon whispered, At last I will understand the Trinity!”

Every Sunday of the Christian year features Bible passages that deal with times and seasons, events, teachings, Psalms of Praise. Trinity Sunday is the only one that deals with a Theological Construct, a very human way of trying to explain the mystery of God.

I’ve noticed the Jehovah’s Witnesses have also been under lockdown, but their usual assault – on me at least – is to tell them where in the Bible the word Trinity is found. I counter with the question “Where is the name Jehovah found? A reference to a mistranslation of YAHWEH. Linda then shouts ‘Don’t get into another argument!’

The Jewish understanding of God was filtered through the narratives of Abraham and Sarah and their lineage; through Moses and Exodus; Judges; Kings and Prophets, Law and Covenant. Always with the hope of liberation, freedom and blessing in the coming of Messiah.

We who follow Christ name him Son of God. Last Sunday we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit – the living breath of God.

Jews can live with mystery, but Greeks rely on Reason. And so the Gentile Church set out on the difficult task of understanding and then proclaiming the Triune God – the work of Centuries and still a labour of our times.

The Creator God, now God the Father; the Redeeming Son, Jesus the Christ; the Life Giving Spirit. One God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

I doubt that there are many people in pulpits this morning who are not being extremely cautious with words. Some years ago now, I wrote the best sermon on the Trinity one could imagine. During the service, I had the children come forward and with some assistance, produced a glass of water, a boiling kettle and a very large ice cube. One element in three forms – each seemingly unique – but sharing the same substance.

Then came the sermon . . . and after the service, off to the door to greet my flock. I got the usual ‘Good Morning’ and 4 people had a word more or less the same – “Great Children’s Story!” Alas . . .

When I was young I remember that God was fierce and angry – he hated sin and at times the whole lot of us. God was appeased by the sacrifice of Jesus. It took Jesus’ blood to cover our sins and – we hoped – make God a little less angry for the time being. The Spirit definitely played third fiddle, important as long as he didn’t make us do embarrassing things like clapping or shouting ‘Amen!’

There have always been attacks on the Trinity within and without the Church. My own feeling is that the Trinity is being stretched almost into 3 distinct beings. There are Jesus churches; there are Spirit churches, there are good old God-fearing Congregations.

The most serious attack, I feel, is on the divinity of Jesus. The modern, rational mind cannot abide mystery – unless in works of fiction. Jesus’ gender upsets some. The claim of ‘Son of God’ is impolite in an era of inter-faith dialogue. God has become impersonal in the Church and Jesus is a bit too personal it seems.

In the NYT a few weeks ago, I read an article about the Virus in the Church. Churches are not growing in the US. Why? Secular people are rightly offended by the large numbers of Evangelical Christians who not only voted for Donald Trump, but proclaimed him a servant of God to chase the godless out of Washington.

We see in Russia, Poland, Brazil, Uganda, Philippines . . . so many autocrats claiming to be God’s warriors against secularism, LGBTQs and refugees.

Well, what is a faithful person, a serious person to think? We might walk with Nicodemus to find out about this Jesus:

1. We might flatter Jesus, but then he tells us if we really want to perceive the depths of God’s reign that we must be born anew – from above. Born anew of water and the Spirit. Oh . . . we answer.
2. Before we can ask our follow-up, Jesus talks about the wind – we remember a novel from high school English – ‘Who has seen the wind?’ – mysterious, yes indeed! This Spirit seems to have a will of her own – more mysterious.
3. Then Jesus goes off on his own: up and down to heaven – Moses and a serpent, being lifted up. Time for a coffee. .
4. But then – For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Paul speaks of death to our desires and life in the Spirit – a life in which we join Jesus as uttering ‘Abba’ and becoming heirs of all that the Triune God is and ever shall be.

Let me make these observations:

- God is love and the Triune God spun out a universe and found a place where life might thrive. All creatures are given this blessing.
- This God works from the inside out. God calls Abraham and Sarah – works with and through them; talks to them. We are told God was as a friend to Abraham. God continues with this rather dysfunctional bunch, follows Joseph to Egypt and eventually finds a refugee baby called Moses. I know we get tired of the begats in the O.T. but it seems God is interested in individuals, in families, in keeping the flock together – in having friends.

Jesus could have waited for the days of PowerPoint and Zoom but he came within a poor family. He called disciples and not one from an Ivy League College and trusted them with the most precious message the world will ever know.

Might not this God be interested in us and our families – asking us to take risks we never thought possible? Eager to be as a friend to us?

- **God desires our freedom** – and for freedom Christ sets us free. By the Holy Spirit we live in freedom bound only by love.
- **God is joy** – a joy that permeates the heavens; a joy we glimpse on a star-filled night. Joy in home and friends – even with ourselves!
- **God is faithful**- ever faithful.
- And so we live in HOPE.

We are triune in a way: Body, Mind and Spirit. We spend a lot of resources caring for our bodies and educating our minds. But it seems our spirits are downcast: Covid, of course, but the gods we fashion do not bring joy, justice or peace.

It is time to allow the Spirit to reign free – rebirthing us as children – full of wonder, awe, hope and humour.

God is serious – but maybe not in the way we think. Listen for the divine chuckle – sometimes called thunder.

Listen for the wind as the Spirit moves as she wills.

Listen for Jesus – you might hear your name being called.

Blessed be the Triune God – Creator, Redeemer and Spirit of Truth.