

Isaiah 6: 1-8 | Ps. 29 | Romans 8:12-17 | John 3: 1-17

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Did you remember the words of the hymn? Did you sing along at home? Oh, I did. It is absolutely one of my favorites:

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love and purity.

4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday. The Trinity is a mystery. Amen.

Well, that is tempting, but there may be a few more words for us today. I had some good time in our church garden this week, pulling weeds and looking for inspiration. Who in the world am I to speak of the Trinity? What understanding can I bring, and how does that all become a message from a deacon? I was pulling and pondering, digging and doubting my abilities, getting muddy and muddled, when the Spirit intervened, as she always does during my sermon writing. Her words were clear. "It is a mystery, let it be."

And thus began this journey into mystery.

I found these words staring at me from a page, and knew they were meant for us to share.

"The doctrine of the Trinity is notoriously hard to understand. It is a human attempt to explain who the Christian Church had understood God to be, on the basis of Scripture. The biblical bases for the doctrine are important. They are pointers to what the church has been led to say in confessing that God is one and this one God is three persons at the same time: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... God is known to us in three persons—distinguishing God's eternal being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all of whom are equally 'God' and who biblically and historically, are distinctively at work in the world. God's work in 'three persons' is still the work of the 'one God' since the Godhead cannot be divided or separated. The three are one; the One is three. God is one God in three persons. How this is possible is

a mystery. Yet the church affirms the Trinity as its basic belief about God."

- Donald K McKim, *Feasting on the Word*, pp. 26, 28

Well, I'm glad that is all cleared up now. The Trinity is mystery—the three in one, one in three, remains a mystery—and the basis of our faith. But not completely understanding and putting words to the Trinity doesn't mean that we don't enter into the spirituality of the Godhead. The Trinity teaches us, redeems us, sanctifies us, creates us, loves us, rescues us, and is the Christ within us. And from this Trinity we know and understand relationship. The Trinity is our example, our mentor on love and being in relationship with our fellow human beings, with the Earth, with all God's creation. Relationship. Collaboration. Love. Acceptance. Respect. Compassion. Care. These are the qualities of the Trinity that we adopt as our own, they are God-given gifts to us.

It is the presence—the presence of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the presence of creation, redemption, sanctification, that makes us Christians. It is the relationship with God, with one another, with creation. God dwells within us, in the Holy Spirit.

In this God, this HOLY TRINITY we see the community, the collaboration, the entwinement that love brings for us.

I sat in a clergy conference on Tuesday as our Bishop led us in conversation and meditation about the Holy Eucharist and Liberation Theology—the care and liberation of those who are oppressed in any situation. The idea of Liberation Theology calls us into social responsibility, and this is where the Trinity intersects with the Holy Eucharist, which intersects with our social responsibility.

Bishop Akiyama used Eucharistic Prayer D, part of which comes into us with these words,

"To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners, freedom, to the sorrowful, joy. To fulfill your purpose, he gave himself up to death; and, rising from the grave, destroyed death, and made the whole creation new.

And that we might live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us, he sent the Holy Spirit, his own first gift for those who believe, to complete his work in the world, and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all."

There it is, the intersection of the Trinity, Holy Eucharist, and social justice.

When we come to receive the elements, when we approach whatever altar we find and worship as we receive, we take in the mystery of the Trinity. We take in the relationship, the love, the social responsibility. When we kneel, if we do, or when we stand and receive, we stand in solidarity and in communion with all God's people.

The relationship that is the Godhead, and that is ours for the asking, is to be shared outward:

"it is the nature of God to be in relationship. On Trinity Sunday we celebrate that most fundamental element of faith and practice: Christian relationship. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us of the communal inner life of God: God the Father is with the Son who is with the Spirit who is with the Father, self-communicating, self-giving, self-receiving. When we profess the Trinity, we affirm that it is of the essence of God to be in relationship. But we also acknowledge that it is the nature of God to take the initiative in search of communion, to reveal God's self as the source of life itself, to pursue us, to come to us to reveal God's self as the source of all creation, the salvation of all God has created, the sustainer of all life. Here is One who is vulnerable to us in every way, yet cannot be possessed, utterly

basic to our existence, yet beyond our reach.”

- Judith M McDaniel, *Feasting on the Word*, p. 47

Let's look at the Isaiah reading again for today:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.” And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

From early times, this passage has been viewed as pointing to what later became the Christian doctrine of the Trinity—it anticipates what the early church gradually came to understand as the doctrine of the Trinity, given expression at the Council of Nicaea in 325 BCE.

The call at the end of Isaiah sends us out with burning and burned lips, wounded and purified, called and redeemed to do the work of God's people. We don't get to stay inside in the incense, glorifying and singing. We are called out, needing to be in relationship with all of God's people—those who come in the night with doubts and misunderstandings, those searching for miracles, those not searching at all. We are to be among them, in relationship with each and every one, sharing the message of love and redemption, sharing the message that God has burned into our lips and our hearts.

When we make the sign of the cross across our upper bodies, and repeat, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are bathing ourselves in the grace and love that is our God. This is not an idle signal to some remote heavenly figure, or a secret fraternity sign of belonging, or even a rite that everyone does so we do it too. This, this...marks us as surely as baptism, reminds us of who we belong to, and engulfs us in waves of love and grace. It brings us into relationship with God, and, just as surely, sends us out to be in relationship with those who need us most. The call from Isaiah is answered in one way, “Here am I, send me.”

It is a statement of courage and love and commitment. It is a call to each of us, “Whom shall I send? Here am I, Send me.” It is a call that demands and takes sacrifice and resources, and awareness of need. It takes something out of us, it asks for us to be uncomfortable and self-giving. God sends us out to help our brothers and sisters who live on the street, dirty, addicted, helpless. God calls us to make a difference for people of color, to stand up for racial equity and healing. God calls us to feed every single person who is hungry, to provide shelter and health care and love to the least of us. God calls us to step out of our churches and out of our church families, and spread the love of God, the good news of salvation, wherever we go, no matter how awkward we feel. God calls us, and our burning hearts and lips cannot help but respond, “Here am I, send me.” And as we go, we carry the Eucharist within us, sanctified and redeemed by the Trinity—one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.