

Trinity Sunday



The Rev. Ryan Wiksell

May 26, 2024 | Trinity Sunday

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God.

- What's the deal with that Isaiah passage? I mean... what's the deal?
 - The King dies
 - Six-winged angels show up, looking like snakes on fire
 - Then God appears, so overwhelming the massive temple is filled by a toe
 - Isaiah is there. He's not a prophet yet.
 - But he is dumbstruck by the scene
 - He knows he's not worthy. "Woe is me! I am unclean!"
 - So one of those wacky angels takes a glowing coal off the grill
 - With a pair of tongs... it's so hot even a fiery snake-angel can't touch it
 - And touches it to Isaiah's lips
 - I mean... what is the *deal* with this Isaiah passage?
- Maybe we'll never learn the "deal". It's just too weird.
 - But we might have a shot at getting the point.
 - And I think that point is found in the middle. "Holy, Holy, Holy"
 - It's a construct we're pretty familiar with, and usually call the Sanctus (Latin for "holy")
 - Some traditions teach that that three-times holy utterance is a sign of the Trinity. Holy Father, Holy Son, and of course, Holy Spirit.
 - It is Trinity Sunday after all.
 - The teaching tells us that there are some things on earth that are holy: a copy of the Bible, the Altar, the Sacrament, the services we conduct, etc. You might say these things are once-holy
 - But God, apparently, is thrice-holy.
- This is maybe the most baffling idea in all of Christianity. $3=1$ and $1=3$.
 - And yet it's one of the most foundational ideas.

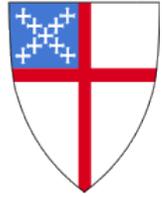
- It's "load-bearing", to the extent that almost all of the "heresies" throughout history have been some form of getting the Trinity wrong.
- That's not really fair is it? To expect every Christian to sign on to this irrational formula without messing it up whatsoever?
- Maybe this is a dangerous thing for me to say, but...
 - I don't believe in heresy.
 - Mainly because... I don't believe in orthodoxy.
 - In other words, I don't think Christianity is all about "right belief". That's not what Jesus seemed to have in mind.
 - And if there is no one "right" way to believe, then there are no wrong ways to believe
 - I can virtually guarantee you that when you face God some day, God will not quiz you about the difference between homoousios or homoiousios. Those are real words, by the way – the Greek way of distinguishing between "same substance" and "similar substance"
 - God understands it. God does not expect *you* to understand it. It's my job to know stuff like this and I barely understand it.
- So what does God expect from us if not "right belief"?
 - In my opinion, God expects us to Love.
 - I think God actually will ask us, some day when we're face to face: How did you love?
 - And none of us will be able to say we loved perfectly, or even super well.
 - That's where Grace will come in. God is a God of forgiveness and second chances
 - But don't let that distract you from the fact that God cares deeply how we live. Which is mainly a question of how we love.
- And we learn how to love by looking at God

- Now, when Isaiah looked at God he couldn't figure out what to make of it
- All he could feel was self-pity. Inadequacy.
- God is so far above, and I am so far below.
- And it's true. God is holy. God is thrice-holy.
 - And we don't often feel very holy, like Isaiah didn't
 - And the more holy we see God to be, the more dirty we look to ourselves
 - But here's the kicker
- What did God (and the seraphs) do when Isaiah said "I am unclean"?
 - Did they say "Yes! You are unclean! Bow and scrape before us"?
 - No! They cleansed him.
 - But hear me carefully. I don't believe that coal to the lips was to cleanse Isaiah of his sin
 - I believe it was to cleanse him of his self-doubt. His inferiority complex.
 - As if God was saying "Shhh.... Shut up. Don't ever say that again."
 - "Yes, I am holy. Yes, I am magnificent and lofty."
 - "But guess what... so are you."
- Jesus said it to Nicodemus. You and I were "born from above".
 - But we have to embrace it.
 - You get to decide. As long as you declare yourself unworthy, like Isaiah did, you will be unclean.
 - But when you embrace your creation in God's image... when you declare that you are indeed "born from above" you are clean. You are holy, just as God is holy
 - And you are therefore equipped to love, just as God loves.
- Some scholars suppose that love is the entire point of the Trinity, after all.

- That before a single molecule of the universe was created, The Son was there to be loved by the Father. And the Spirit to be loved by the Son, and the Father to be loved by the Spirit.
 - And together they danced, full of unity and diversity, full of motion and steadfastness, full of justice and mercy, feeding into one other, and feeding off of one another.
 - Until one day, when they decided to pour out this dance into a thing called a Universe.
 - With a special focus on just one creature: humankind.
 - And their dream for us was to dance just as they dance. To love just as they love. And to find that unity and diversity in us, just as we find it in a Triune God.
- God is holy, and so are you.
 - God is lofty, and so are we.
 - God is love. so I am love. So you are love. So we are love.
 - Amen.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
First Sunday after Pentecost:
Trinity Sunday

Year B
RCL



Isaiah 6:1-8
Romans 8:12-17
John 3:1-17
Psalm 29
or Canticle 13 (or Canticle 2)

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

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

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” 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!”

The Response

Psalm 29

Afferte Domino

- 1 Ascribe to the LORD, you gods, *
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name; *
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
- 3 The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders; *
the LORD is upon the mighty waters.
- 4 The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice; *
the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.
- 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees; *
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
- 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, *
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the LORD splits the flames of fire;
the voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; *
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 8 The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe *
and strips the forests bare.
- 9 And in the temple of the LORD *
all are crying, "Glory!"
- 10 The LORD sits enthroned above the flood; *
the LORD sits enthroned as King for evermore.
- 11 The LORD shall give strength to his people; *
the LORD shall give his people the blessing of peace.

or

Canticle 13

A Song of Praise *Benedictus es, Domine*

Song of the Three Young Men, 29-34

- Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers; *
you are worthy of praise; glory to you.
- Glory to you for the radiance of your holy Name; *
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.
- Glory to you in the splendor of your temple; *
on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.
- Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim; *
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.
- Glory to you, beholding the depths; *
in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.

Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

The Epistle

Romans 8:12-17

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

The Gospel

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may 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.