



Sermon for Trinity Sunday
May 25-26, 2024

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Saint Paul and Saint Luke
Episcopal Churches

Scripture

Isaiah 6: 1 - 8

Canticle 13

Romans 8: 12 - 17

Gospel of John 3: 1-17

WHOM SHALL I SEND?

Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This weekend marks our annual celebration of the Holy Trinity - God in three persons - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Last weekend we welcomed the Holy Spirit with a festive worship service that included liturgical dance and an original composition by Valerie and Bob Henry.

This weekend, we are pleased to have harpist and cantor Davie Krak join us so we can lift our voices and spirits in a joyous manner - as we celebrate the essence of our Christian faith.

As one who reads and listens to theological interpretation when preparing a sermon, I couldn't help but notice how many authors commented on what a difficult Sunday this is to preach. Trinity Sunday is the **WHOLE DEAL**. It's our best definition in human terms of the all powerful Divinity whom we worship and love with all our hearts and souls.

Some biblical scholars argue that the Holy Spirit was not present in the writings of the Hebrew bible, which we refer to as the Old Testament. Yet, today's passage from Isaiah makes a strong case for the divine revelation and impact "the King, the LORD of Hosts."

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory".

Following the death of King Uzziah, Isaiah had a vision - he saw the Lord sitting on a throne. A seraph flew to him and touched him on the lips with a hot coal - burning his lips and removing Isaiah's guilt and blotting out his sin. Imagine who Isaiah felt - even if his encounter with the most high was a dream.

What happened next? Isaiah was changed forever. When the Lord called "Whom Shall I Send?" Isaiah responded and said "Here am I: send me!"

Isaiah's encounter with the divine as reflected in this passage is one of his most famous prophecies. Many of us who have been touched by God can recall the times, places and emotions that our encounters with the Divine had on our lives. Hopefully our lips weren't burned by a hot coal - but we felt the impact of God's presence - often during times of despair and dislocation.

God's touch, filled with grace, compassion and love - is Life Changing.

What is your call story? When have you felt the impact of God's grace, compassion and love most powerfully?

I pray that over the summer you will share your God stories with me and with others here at Saint Paul/Saint Luke. Our journeys in faith are unique. By sharing our stories with each other, we can come to realize that we worship a God who is capable of AMAZING things.

Our clergy conference was led by the Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, the Rt. Reverend Craig Loya. During four energetic sessions he encouraged clergy from our two dioceses - CPA and Bethlehem to truly act as if we are capable of living into God's outrageous promises.

Genesis 12: verses 1 - 3 speak to the Lord's command to Abraham

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

Imagine if you were Abram - being told to leave everything behind - the land that you know and travel to an unknown land with your barren wife to make a great nation.

What if Abram had said no to God?

By following God's command, God's promises to Abram and to all of us were fulfilled. Generations of faithful people descended from Abram's decision to follow God's commands.

The Gospel lesson today is another familiar story - this time of a nighttime conversation between a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. Like many Jews, he was trying to figure out whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. He came by night to approach Jesus, which is how many "secret" disciples of Jesus appeared since it was controversial as Jews didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Nicodemus appears two other times in John's Gospel - 7:50 - 51, asking that Jesus be given a hearing prior to his arrest by the Temple police "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" The police didn't believe that as a Pharisee he could believe in Jesus. Cynically the police replied "No prophet has ever come from Galilee."

Nicodemus also joins with Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus to bury his crucified body.

Nicodemus demonstrated discipleship - demanding fair treatment of Jesus and burying him with honor.

So his questions of Jesus were expressed honestly and with compassion.

"Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God - no one can do these signs (miracles) apart from the presence of God." Nicodemus asks.

Jesus responded -

"No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus " no one can re-enter their mother's womb and be born again."

Jesus restates: “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.”

Is Jesus referring to baptism - when we are marked as Christ's own forever. We recited our Baptismal covenant last weekend in honor of Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Yet the salvation that Jesus describes is not within our human span of control - it's God's doing.

Jesus states his purpose for in John 3:16; For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.

God didn't send us Jesus to condemn the world but in order that the world may be saved by Him.

The HOPE of our Salvation - we are saved by God's grace when we accept the gift of FAITH and follow God's commands to LOVE one another as He loves us. FAITH HOPE and LOVE, but the greatest of these is LOVE.

Jennifer McDowell, Theology Professor at Virginia Theological Seminary summarizes this passage beautifully:

“The unknowable One has made himself known (through Jesus). The incomprehensible One has made himself heard (through Jesus). God is speaking...

“God searches for us to complete the revelation of God's being. God searches for us to participate in God's life.

It took nearly three centuries for Christians to agree on a common definition of God in three persons. The Council of Nicaea was convened by King Constantine in 325 AD to try and bring an end to the warring factions of faithful people. The Definition of the Union of the Divine and Human Natures in the Person of Christ was further refined during the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Chalcedon discussions clarified the unique dual identity of Christ - complete in Godhead and complete in manhood. (BCP 864 - Historical Documents)

After much deliberation, the faith leaders agreed on the words contained in the Nicene Creed which we will recite shortly. Listen anew when you recite these familiar words - and think about the conversation and debate that must have occurred to reach consensus.

As Christians, we worship the Holy Trinity which represents the three facets of God's divinity:

1. FAITH (in God the Father),
2. HOPE (of the resurrected and healing power of JESUS) and
3. LOVE (the Holy Spirit).

Today is a good opportunity to remember our "Call Story", to reflect on how God has and is working in our lives and commit to serving God more deeply in the company year.

When God asks WHOM shall I send? Will you respond,

"Here am I; Send ME."

May it be so,

Amen.