

All Saints Episcopal Church, Steenrijk

Leidenstraat at Heelsumstraat

Willemstad, Curacao

Trinity (B)

May 26, 2024

DRAFT

“God Loved the World into Creation”

by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

John 3:1-17

Now 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.”

Dear Lord, enliven our hearts anew so we may find within us the presence of the Holy Trinity, one God--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Trinity Sunday is one of the newest major feast days of the church (whereas, Pentecost—we celebrated it last Sunday) is one of the oldest. Bishop Thomas Becket was consecrated bishop in London on Trinity Sunday in 1162, and that special event helped popularize Trinity Sunday in the English church. Pope John the Twenty-second universally enjoined the church to

celebrate the feast of Trinity Sunday almost two centuries later, beginning in the year 1334, while the Anglican Church was still a part of the Roman church—our split occurred about two centuries later. As an offspring of the Roman church, we Anglicans still celebrate Trinity Sunday, and indeed Trinity Sunday has always been a specially observed feast day for well over eight hundred years. Our church's single day observance of Trinity Sunday emphasizes the oneness of God, but it also expresses the fact that we know God "in three persons", Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, separate yet

equal persons of the Holy Trinity. And this observance of Trinity Sunday ends the great feasts of the church which began with the feast of the Incarnation on Christmas day last year and which has continued with the feasts of the Resurrection and the Ascension of the Lord, and the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (which we observed last Sunday).

We use the Trinitarian formula when we baptize someone, “in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. But a question that formula raised for me much later was whether I was perhaps ‘already’ a

Christian, but baptism was the way I or my parents told the world that fact that I was a Christian. Was it the public ‘performance’ that which ‘converted’ me, or was the main importance of that baptism notifying the world, as well as myself and my parents and God parents, that I was in the “in group”, destined as “Christ’s own forever” even before my dunking or effusion or sprinkling? Can humans “make” Christians? Or isn’t the “making” of Christians God’s complete prerogative? Yet, indeed, it seems God commends a public announcement of the importance of

baptism even for God's only Son Jesus when the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus 'as a dove' at Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan when he was about thirty years old. Jesus was not baptized as a baby or as a young teen or at any age between zero and thirty, but when Jesus was in a way an 'old' person in terms of how long the average person lived in Israel in the first decades of the first century AD. The average life expectancy was less than forty years then. So, Jesus would have been more equivalent to a fifty to an eighty- year old in our time and place. Interesting idea, isn't it?

I happen to remember the coming of the Holy Spirit with great electricity into my life at age 32. I had been baptized twenty years earlier, but God spoke to me that day in 1973 so powerfully that it was unmistakable. Changed my life.

I have reflected on how I was given a Gilbert Chemistry set at age twelve when I was in the Sixth Grade. That set me on an educational and employment track that lasted until I was about 36 years old, and my mega-church hired me to be its Business Manager. Then my feet were set on an

entirely new track and opportunity which led four years later to seminary and ordination.

The Holy Trinity cannot be bottled up or stored. The Holy Trinity is a very much alive and energetic way and persons as we know God and are known by God, intimately and intensely, if we allow God to ‘own’ us in our entirety. God does not call the prepared, but God prepares those God calls, was what I found.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas G. Long writes, ‘Every now and then we catch a glimpse, even in a world of pain and violence, of what being in this loving, self-giving,

Trinitarian life of God is like. On a cold January night in 1941, in an unheated barracks at Stalag 8, a German death camp, some of the most beautiful music ever composed was played for the first time. It was played on old, worn instruments by prisoners at the camp; and it had been composed by another prisoner, a Frenchman and devout Christian by the name of Olivier Messiaen. He said he wanted to compose some music that would proclaim, even in the terrors of the death camp, that the love and hope of God were still alive. He was tired of the beat of the Nazi jack boot: hup-two-

three-four.... And so, he composed his music according to a beautiful verse in the French translation of the Book of Revelation, where an angel announces, “There is no more time,” that is to say, at the end of time all broken, jagged, and seemingly hopeless human history will we be gathered into the eternal and loving life of God.

‘He called it “The Quartet for the End of Time.” How do you compose music like that, music without time? The meters, the rhythms are irregular, constantly changing, which means that the musicians cannot play

in splendid isolation, simply counting out their parts in time. Instead, they have to pay attention to each other, to attend to each other. They have to play as an ensemble. More than that, they have to play in communion with each other. In fact, right on the score where most composers would have written, “Play slowly, play moderately, or play rapidly,” Messiaen instead wrote, “Play tenderly, play with ecstasy, play with love.”

‘And that is what the Trinity is all about. To belong to God is to belong to the life of God, to the community of one God in three

persons, and to be called to live our whole lives in the same manner that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to each other--playing tenderly, playing with ecstasy, and playing with love. God loved the world so much that God gave his only Son, and this Son, Jesus Christ, opens his arms wide to welcome us into the very life of God. The trail into God's very own life starts there.'

http://day1.org/3823-the_start_of_the_trail

The Rev. Andrew Greeley wrote: "The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was not revealed to baffle us, to test us, to challenge our faith. Rather the Trinity discloses to us

that there is so much knowledge and so much love in God that it flows over into different personalities. God is necessarily a community of knowledge, power, and love. If a God like that is on our side, of what do we have to be afraid? The doctrine of the Trinity is for our reassurance and consolation.”

<http://www.agreeley.com/homilies96/june0296.html>

The Rev. Janice B. Scott wrote: ‘The key seems to be in the repentance. Most people either go through life thinking they're OK really and certainly as good as the next

person, or, thinking that they're inferior and hopeless and no good to anyone. The first category of persons sees no need for repentance and the second category are entangled in an inauthentic repentance which bemoans their poor position in life, but which doesn't actually move them any nearer to God.

‘But the Bible seems to be able to convince people of their need for God in an authentic way and without groveling. People suddenly realize that they fall short and begin to turn to God in genuine regret for their sins and asking for forgiveness.

Once that point is reached, they're ready to receive God into their lives in a new kind of way, and many have an amazing experience of what seems to be pure love. It's a moment they never forget.'

Nicodemus in the story in our Gospel lesson for today does not realize his barrier is being able to face repentance, to turn from his carefully reasoned verbal joust with Jesus and give his life to him, unconditionally, without argument, so he can become a new person. This was the barrier Nicodemus faced. We are not given his response to Jesus, except the Gospel

writer gives us a hint when he records Nicodemus as being one of those who lovingly placed Jesus' dead crucified body into the stone tomb and rolled the stone across the entrance, the stone that became the key to others later discovering that Jesus had indeed risen from death and that stone grave.

Maybe we still have Jesus in the grave. We are not certain that he really arose, even though we may exclaim our Alleluias. Our hearts may need to be warmed. Our souls need to gain feet. And together with the Holy Spirit we may indeed hear Christ

calling to us, asking us to join him in
proclaiming the Good News to those who
may not ever have heard it before.

Christ is risen. The grave is empty.
Come let us adore him.

Amen.

May 26, 2024

“God Loved the World into Creation”

John 3:1-17

Description:

Jesus comes to us in mysterious ways, sometimes we think we can approach him ‘at night’ without others realizing we are searching for faith. But Christ who is ever faithful will indeed be there for us, challenging us, comforting us, by the Holy Spirit, to realize how loved we are by the God who created all of us and the world.

Tags:

Holy, Spirit, Son, Father, God, love, Trinity,
Bishop, Becket, Pope, John, twenty-second,
English, feast, baptism, secret, public,
Messiaen, Revelation, quartet, Greeley,
Long, Nicodemus, grave, empty, Bible,
night, old, born, above, chemistry, London,
Roman, Jesus, Christ, messiah

Addendum:

Susan Andrews tells this poignant story:
“Augustine was one of the most influential theologians in the developing years of the Christian church. And yet, like most of us, he had a hard time understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. What does it mean to say that there are three persons in just one God? The story goes that one day Augustine went for a walk on the beach. He saw a little boy digging a hole in the sand with a sea shell and then running to the ocean, filling up the shell, and rushing back to pour it into the hole he had made. ‘What

are you doing, my little man?’ Augustine asked. ‘I’m trying to put the ocean in this hole,’ the boy replied. And peace came to Augustine's soul as he realized that this was indeed what he had been trying to do. He had been trying to put God into his mind completely.”

<http://www.sermonmall.com/TheMall/18/052718JJ.html>

May we realize who and how big is our God and not try to limit God’s influence and guidance in our lives.

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St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 South Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701

Trinity Sunday (B)

May 31, 2015

DRAFT

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

“For God So Loved the World”

The Holy Gospel: John 3:1-17

Now 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.”

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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.”

Give us each that life eternal, dear Lord, that we may come into the presence of the Holy Trinity, one God--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--world without end. Amen.

Nicodemus was conveniently present with the Lord in a night which for him would determine the outcome of Nicodemus' entire life and future. Few ever had such an opportunity to have the deepest things of life answered for them. The disciples would have been the closest ones, but even they disbelieved until they saw the risen Lord physically with their own eyes.

Nicodemus seems to slink back into the night from which he came, but we have few clues as to whether he took Jesus' words to heart. Some think he did become a secret follower, and perhaps he did since we see him caring for the dead corpse of Jesus after it had been removed from the cross. And one time earlier Nicodemus had defended Jesus from a rash plan of the Sanhedrin court to arrest Jesus. But Nicodemus' faith is circumstantial--we never know finally how his life developed: was he a secret believer or did he become a secret follower?

We never know for sure. But God's knowledge is far above ours.

What about our own lives? Would we risk detection of jealous friends or potential enemies to ask questions about our own fate, our own life? Or would we simply not make the effort, shying away from any direct encounter with truth?

Trinity Sunday is a day which emphasizes both the mystery and the power of God through the three aspects or "persons" of God--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a profound truth which turned the whole world upside down. The first

person on record to write about the trinitarian character of God was Bishop Theophilus of Antioch in around 180 AD. Bishop Theophilus' ideas developed of course from biblical texts such as the ones which we have read today, as well as from some others. The word, "trinity," never appears in the Bible itself, but the formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit occurs biblically several times in varying contexts. The innovation of thinking of God as having three aspects or three persons was threatening for those who had never conceived of God as being anything more

than a somewhat distant divinity. For God to enter our universe and to live on our planet was mind-boggling. How could God be both in heaven and on earth at the same time? How could God be so particularized, so well defined, as a person by the name of Jesus? How could God die as they saw Jesus die on the cross? Yet the presence of God's Spirit was time and again shown to be very real. We know in our own lives that God's Spirit lives within us, and that the Spirit of God empowers us to do far more than we could do on our own. We know the stories of Jesus ascending to heaven, that

Jesus spoke of going back to where he had originated, that only he of all persons on earth had come from God and was going back to God. Jesus was clear about who and what he was. But we have a difficult time understanding the mystery of God, how God can be present to us at the same time God is present to someone else thousands of miles away. God is far more than a very fast computer that can calculate infinitely millions of times faster than IBM's Big Blue or any chess master. God is totally other, yet God is totally with us and within us as

God's Spirit if we have faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus tried to get Nicodemus to understand that being born spiritually is what life ultimately is all about. Without our own rebirth from above, we are destined for the same fate as the temporary earth which one day will disappear. Without birth from above our life will be forever transitory, frail, and expendable. But with our rebirth in and of the Spirit we have a new life which will never end, life eternal.

One writer has said that the world tends to live in accordance with three dominant

values--achievement, affluence, and appearance--achievement, affluence, and appearance; but all of these are ends in themselves and leave us empty.

But how can we tell if we have been truly born from above? If we have this new birth then each week our hearts will be softer towards others, more caring, less intent on keeping a record of their faults and flaws. On the other hand, if we haven't been born with God's Spirit our hearts will grow colder day by day and harder week by week. No one ever stays the same: either we progress or we regress. And it is only by the

grace of God and with God's help that we can move closer to God in our day-to-day life. And we can first believe only if God has given us the grace to believe--we can first believe only if God has given us the grace to believe. We can do nothing on our own except, except, refuse the infusion of God's Holy Spirit into our life. We can even go through the motions of reading our Bibles daily and praying, but if we resist the upward call of God, if we resist the rebirthing of God's Holy Spirit, then all our superficial religiosity goes for nothing. Even attending church does not guarantee us

a place in the eternal arms of God. Only a change of heart, only a new birth from above will guarantee us permanent status with our heavenly Father, with the divine Daddy. But once we have this new birth from above, each day God will be working to change us into more loving, more caring, gentler, more thankful, and more gracious personalities. The Spirit will always be at hand encouraging us, cheering for us, supporting us in our growth in Christ. But on the other hand, we ourselves can turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to God.

By the time I was 10 or 11 years old I and most members of my elementary school class had memorized John 3:16, which is next to the last verse of our gospel lesson for today: “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.” And after memorizing John 3:16 each of us children had been rewarded by the elementary school with the gift of a small red booklet containing the whole Gospel according to John. But even memorizing John 3:16 really did not change my life or probably anyone else’s. It gave

me an anchor for my faith if I had faith, but the act of memorizing John 3:16 did not guarantee me the promise in John 3:16.

Mental knowledge does not mean mental assent, a memory verse did not mean mental and spiritual agreement. However, I was still able to survive in life by avoiding breaking the laws of the land and the laws of my parents. But I was still under the control of law and not under control of the grace of God. So I was able to try to fool myself into thinking I was a Christian when internally in my deepest being I realized my faith was no more than skin deep.

Perhaps that is where you are today--you know your faith is only skin deep. But you yearn for a more personal relationship with God. Well, good news! God is yearning for a more intimate relationship with you. No matter what your age, you can never be too old or too young. Today may be your lucky day, today you can let those barriers to God fall away finally and forever. Today you too can be born from above. And as I say that, the Spirit may be blowing in your ear and moving in your heart, warming you inside, refining your thoughts. We never know just where the Spirit may be working. No one

will necessarily be able to see it in your face. We can hide the Good News from everyone except ourselves, much like we can hide the fact that we really don't have the spiritual interior life which we know we would have if we would only let God's Holy Spirit inhabit us and direct our life.

Trinity Sunday is actually one of the newest major feast days of the church. Bishop Thomas Becket was consecrated bishop in London on Trinity Sunday in 1162, and that special event helped popularize Trinity Sunday in the English church. Pope John the Twenty-second

universally enjoined the church to celebrate the feast of Trinity Sunday almost two centuries later, beginning in the year 1334. Our church's single day observance emphasizes the oneness of God. And this observance ends the great feasts of the church which began with the feast of the Incarnation on Christmas day last year and which has continued with the feasts of the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord, and the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which we observed last Sunday.

The mystery of the Trinity had its roots of explanation in the writings of the African layperson Tertullian in the early third century; Tertullian explained the “generation” or “begottenness” of the Son of God as having derived from the act of thinking on the part of God the Father.

Some two centuries later Bishop Augustine of Hippo in Africa explained the Holy Spirit as being the mutual love of the Father and the Son. Some of the Old Testament biblical texts in which the Trinity is prefigured are in the book of Genesis, in which the appearance of God is described as

three persons who came to Abraham and Sarah on the way to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And Isaiah, Chapter 6, which we read earlier, speaks of the three-fold acclamation of the heavenly beings called the seraphs or seraphim who praised God in the words of our opening hymn, “Holy, holy, holy,” which is now a part of every Eucharist, every mass, and is known as the “Sanctus”. The Trinity, the three aspects or persons of God are co-equal, co-eternal, without confusion, without subordination, uncreated, and incomprehensible. That seems to make it

OK not to be able to understand exactly what the Trinity really is, as only God can “understand” God. But the very important concept of the Trinity affirms the divinity of the character of Jesus Christ as being one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The Christian’s belief in the Trinity sets Christianity off from every other religion in the world; our belief in the Trinity is expressed in both our Apostles Creed and our Nicene Creed, one of which we say each Sunday. Only Christianity affirms the full Godliness of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. To all other religions of the

world this is pure heresy. John of Damascus, called a Doctor of the Church, John of Damascus in the eighth century AD described the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity as a “perichoresis,” which means a dancing around together of the three persons of the Godhead as three dancers might hold hands in perfect love, each having perfect freedom yet acting in harmony with the others, deriving from one intimate, indissoluble substance but still a recognizable “community” which always acts with mutual love expressed in and through each other for all eternity.

Some recent and not so recent seminary graduates and a few bishops and some so-called “trial liturgies” can occasionally be heard giving a “non-sexist” blessing at the end of a church service, which goes something like, “The blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer be with you now and for ever.” Maybe you have heard that sort of blessing. But oddly that blessing is in fact a bit of a heresy, as such a blessing seems to imply that God the Father is only Creator, whereas we know God is certainly Spirit and is also able to redeem us; and God the Son is not only

Redeemer, but God the Son was also present at the moment of creation as Creator and is present with us now as Spirit; and God the Holy Spirit is not only the one who sustains and comforts us, but the Holy Spirit is also the one who redeems us by the grace of God as well as being the one as the Creator who moved across the face of the waters in the beginning of creation as described in Genesis Chapter 1. The only valid use of such a presumed sex-free blessing is if one randomly selected the order of citation each time such a blessing is given--that is to say "God, Redeemer, Creator, and Sustainer"

one Sunday, and the next Sunday say “God Sustainer, Redeemer, and Creator,” and then switch the order yet again the next Sunday.

But the use of this supposed sexless Trinitarian blessing is occasionally in the vogue today in spite of its lack of theological grounding.

The Holy Trinity is powerful in its concept but even more powerful in the way we actually experience God in our day to day lives. We know that God the Son was speaking to us just as Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus. The Spirit reminds us of our heavenly destiny which only we can derail

by our unbelief and refusal of God's grace.

The Father created us for a future of community with all the heavenly beings and with all the saints who have gone before us.

But by the grace of God it is up to us to say "yes" to our God, to believe in our God, to love our God, and to prove our love of God and our Lord Jesus Christ by loving our neighbors as God has loved us.

Amen.