

SUNDAY, May 26, 2024 "Discussions at Night"

Isaiah 6:1-8 Romans 8:12-17 John 3:1-17

If I ask you "Who is God to you?" What would you say? How would you answer? Some might envision the human persona of Jesus the Risen Christ. Some might see the image of the bird or dove flying in the wind. Others might even say a hand whose fingers point to brilliant sunsets, planets and sun lining up or even to beautiful and unique flowers or creatures made by the Creator's hand. And each response although slightly different, there would still be many with some similarities because this is the doctrine of our faith that says God is all three- Creator, Christ and Spirit. For many people this is because of what one might have experienced in their lives—be it consciously or unconsciously. For example, people have shared their stories of seeing God's glory as they have straddled the line between life and death—near death experiences. Others have also had deep visions of Jesus' presence with open hands showing the places where his hands were hurt with nails. And others have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit which changed their personalities for a few minutes to responding to a moment when a feeling unlike others was experienced with a calm assurance coming from outside to within.

Visions, dreams and candid discussions about God and who God is and may be in one's life is our focus on this Trinity Sunday. Trinity being God in three persons—Father, Son and Spirit and who we are as believers in what we say and do in God's name.

The prophet Isaiah shared his vision of God in the temple in our reading from Isaiah 6. The Lord is sitting on the throne on high and the hem of his robe is huge- filling the temple. There were seraphs above God and they were calling out to others and saying "Holy, holy, holy if the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." A statement which is also recorded in Revelation by John of Patmos when he shares his vision of God.

But Isaiah's vision continues with the place being filled with smoke as he has realized that he has seen the king on the throne- God. One of the seraphs holding a coal from the altar comes to him and touches his mouth with it. He states, now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out. With the coal from the altar, Isaiah is forgiven. Then suddenly God speaks and asks, "Whom shall I send, who will go for us?" Not me-but us.. and Isaiah responds, "Here am I send me" God then answers and gives the message for him to share with the people that they are to listen.

A vision? An experience? A message of what to do and say. Isaiah shares this message with the leadership of the time and eventually tells him the prophecy of a young woman who will

bear a son, whose name shall be Immanuel. One must remember that this vision/prophecy is over 400 years before Jesus is born!

Note what God asks. Who will go for us? Who is the 'us'? Us is of course God- F, S, and Spirit! And who is God sending? God begins with Isaiah to tell the story again as he has been forgiven of sins and made whole with the coal of fire. But what about you? Would you respond to God's message of forgiveness having this happen to you in this vision of Isaiah. Or does this seem to easy? Here am I send me.

Maybe you have experienced God the way Nicodemus did. Remember Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a well-respected, learned man in the Jewish tradition. He had questions about who Jesus was and what he represented and even whether he was the long- awaited messiah. But Nicodemus was also fearful of what others might think if he went to Jesus in the daytime. So Nicodemus arranged a meeting with Jesus at night.

How often do you stop and pray- at night? What is included in your discussions? Do you share your requests, your prayers for others and for yourself? Do you have questions for which you seek answers about Jesus? Does what you say help you to figure out Jesus' role in your life? Just what does it mean to say I believe in heavenly and earthly things? What do you ask of Jesus to teach you, show you and help you do?

Nicodemus stated that Jesus was a teacher who had come from God for no one could do these things which set him apart from God. He asked, "What does it mean for someone to be born from above?" And Jesus explained that one needed to be born of water and Spirit. It is this Spirit which enables us to know who God is. So it is all connected- Jesus spoke to Nicodemus as the Son of God, about the Spirit! The Trinity in this discussion at night!

Yet Nicodemus was still not sure. And when Jesus asked him as a teacher of Israel how he did not know these things. Jesus then tells him that no one has ascended into heaven except the one who has descended from heaven—meaning himself- born of flesh to Mary, and who would ascend to be with the Father. Jesus tells Nicodemus what will happen to him eventually because he is the Son of Man. What Jesus teaches Nicodemus is foundational to the Christian faith. It is verse 16 that when read and internalized and reflected and prayed upon gives us a vision, an experience of Christ and causes the Spirit to move upon us all.

*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. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

It is the Spirit in the world that enables us all to receive this gift of eternal life. But as Paul wrote to the Roman church we need to listen to the Spirit because it bears witness with us so that we might be identified as children of God. The Spirit is with us for we are people who have experienced Pentecost and look to who we might be. Are you a child of God? Have you been welcomed into God's family? We look forward to those times when we welcome babies, children and adults alike into God's family. This we will celebrate next week through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. But today our focus is on how our discussions, visions and experiences of God as Trinity- 3 in 1 enables us to understand in our human way who God is.

Not everyone understands this doctrine right away—but as we grow in faith we will learn that we are loved by God so much he sent Jesus to die for our wrongdoings and after he died he rose to life. Jesus returned to the Father in heaven and sent the Spirit which was already present with the Father to be with us forever. Everything has come full circle even through the prophet's words of who will go for us? God is calling you and I to go and tell others.

To be nourished along the way we are also to take time to reflect on what Jesus did—coming to earth as human even though he is God's Son, to take on our sins, to die and rise again. And to do this, we need to remember him. To feel his presence and to know again in our hearts that we are his. This is why we call Communion holy—yes we eat and drink, but what it symbolizes is that we are one in Christ, one with God and one as the Spirit moves us here in person and to those who experience the wonder of God's blessings online.

Nicodemus' talk with Jesus one night helped him to see Jesus as Rabbi but also as Son of God, Son of Man, and the Spirit of God which comes down from heaven. Nicodemus has shown us the way to see God again—3 in 1 and for this we must listen again to Christ's message of life eternal. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Holy God, for being you- F,S, HS. Thank you for showing us and sharing with us visions of hope from years past as we search for what is to come this day. Be with us as we do what Jesus asks us to do. Show us your way O God. Be with us we pray as we share our thoughts with you. Amen.

