

The Sacred and Holy Trinity

I have been preaching for 15 years and have yet to meet a preacher who enjoys writing the sermon and preaching for Trinity Sunday. I have colleagues who intentionally take that Sunday off, in order to avoid the burden of preaching something that is unknowable and thus understandable.

And yet, he we are.

There are many heresies surrounding the Trinity, thus making it a veritable minefield in trying to "explain" the Trinity. Believe me, I have tried. Every year I tangle myself into knots trying to figure out the "best" and "clearest" way to describe the Sacred and Holy Trinity.

Not this year.

Bear with me. Please.

This sermon will not be about an explanation of WHAT the Trinity IS, but rather WHO the Trinity ARE.

Many view the Triune God as a Hierarchy with God at the top, followed by Jesus and the Holy Spirit at the bottom. This is not theologically correct, assuming that the Holy Spirit is a New Testament invention. The Holy Spirit is not the third member of the Trinity because of hierarchy.

Let us think, instead, of the Trinity as a triangle, with God at one side, Jesus at another side and the Holy Spirit at the third side. The Trinity depends on each other. The three members of the Trinity are not each other, they are of themselves but cannot exist without the other.

In other words, God is NOT Jesus. God is NOT the Holy Spirit. Jesus is NOT God. Jesus is NOT the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is NOT God. The Holy Spirit is NOT Jesus.

The three members of the Trinity are interdependent. They cannot exist without the other two. Not the least of which because it would be a duality instead of a trinity. In other words, God **cannot be**, without Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus **cannot be**, without God and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit **cannot be**, without Jesus and God.

Still with me?

One of the things that has tripped up many theologians, and believers, over time is the idea that God has a gender. God does not. Yes, I know we read of God as gendered male in scripture, but that is more a translation assumption than actual proof. The reality is that God is too large to encompass a single gender, or any gender at all.

I see the Trinity like this...Jesus is male. That is something which is commonly agreed upon.. The Holy Spirit is not gendered, but does have many feminine qualities assigned to her. God is simply God.

Still with me?

When we look at the reading for today, from Isaiah 6, we are told that the LORD (God) was seated, high and lofty in [the] throne and the hem of [their] robe filled the temple. We aren't told just how large the temple was. Let's assume it was a good size, say, a standard cathedral-sized throne room, which would be approximately 150 square feet. That's a LOT of material in one place. What is the significance of the hem length of the robe?

Robes were generally worn by royalty. The length of the hem of the robe signified wealth and status. One would assume, given these instructions, that God's hem would be the grandest hem. Regardless, it was an impressive vision.

Next we hear of the seraphim. Have you ever seen a seraph or a group of seraphim? They are the size of an average man, let's say 5 feet 10 inches tall. It is generally accepted that a wingspan would be the length between a person's outstretched arms, fingertip to fingertip. So, in a person of 5 feet 10 inches, the wingspan would be 70 inches.

We are told,

"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.'

(Isaiah 6.2-3, NRSV)

Let's examine an image of this...these large, flying biped creatures with six wings flying above God. We aren't told how many seraph there were, so let's assume there are three. Each has three sets of wings, measuring 70 inches. They are a spectacular sight to behold. One set of wings covered their eyes because it was understood that you could not look on the face of God and live. One set covered their feet, which was often used as a euphemism for genitals and thus preserved their modesty, as well as covering their feet.. One set they used to fly.

THEN they recite what we have come to know as the Sanctus, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole of heaven and earth is filled with God's glory.

Next, we hear from Isaiah, who is the narrator of this fantastic vision. He describes himself as a man of unclean lips, living with people of unclean lips. In other words, after seeing this majestic view of God and the seraphim, Isaiah feels woefully inadequate. He feels that he cannot live up to what God has called him to do. Isaiah is hoping that someone else will step up and take over. Except, that's not what God sees.

As this is unfolding, the doors to the temple are shaking at the pivots and the room is filling with smoke. A seraph takes a live coal from the altar and places it against Isaiah's mouth, then declares that his lips are clean and his sin has been forgiven.

God then asks "Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?" (Isaiah 6.8, NRSV) and Isaiah volunteers himself. "Here am I; send me". (Isaiah 6.8, NRSV)

Now, back to the Trinity. For me, understanding the Trinity is secondary to understanding the relationships OF the Trinity.

Because you see, it all comes down to the Zulu word "ubuntu, which means "I am because you are." In an article, written by Nkem Ifejika for The Guardian, they explain the word like this.

"Ubuntu means "I am, because you are". In fact, the word ubuntu is just part of the Zulu phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", which literally means that a person is a person through other people. Ubuntu has its roots in humanist African philosophy, where the idea of community is one of the building blocks of society."

(The Guardian, 2006 by Nkem Ifejika)

God cannot be God, without the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Jesus cannot be Jesus, without God and the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit cannot be the Holy Spirit without God and Jesus. Simple enough, right?

You see, it is similar to who we are as a community of faith. I cannot live to the fullness of who I am, without you. We cannot be this amazing community of faith without each other.

The next few weeks will see changes coming to our provinces, our country and our world. We will also see changes coming to our Worship Spaces as we navigate what Summer Worship will look like...will we be virtual? Will they be in person? Will we be outside? Will our services be blended? Don't even ask me about the Fall and what that will be. I can't go there yet!

What I do know is that as we have navigated this time of lockdown and COVID protocols it has opened my eyes and my heart to what it means to "be Church". What I do know is that our Worship services have been enriched with family members from around the globe. What I do know is that there will always be room at the table for everyone who wishes to join, in whatever way they are able.

Because, just as the members of the Sacred and Holy Trinity cannot be without each other; neither can we.

Ubuntu: I am because you are. Now let us be: together. Amen.

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Isaiah 6.1-8

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