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*Holy Trinity Sunday*

*May 30, 2021*

*Isaiah 6:1-8; Ps. 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17*

I've been joking the past couple weeks that just as we had finally perfected creating online worship services we're now having to relearn how to create in-person worship all over again. Have you ever felt that way? You finally get a handle on things and then all of a sudden you have to pivot in a new direction, or learn or relearn something and you wonder if you even have enough brain capacity to really comprehend it?

Thankfully we're not alone today. In our gospel today Nicodemus also thought he had a handle on his understanding of Jesus: "Rabbi," he told Jesus, "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." But clearly Jesus thought Nicodemus needed to learn something new. Jesus responded to him, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." And it's clear that Nicodemus didn't have the brain or heart capacity to truly comprehend this, since he replied in exasperation, "How can these things be?"

I wonder if at times we have the same difficulty comprehending Jesus, or on this day, the Holy Trinity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We say the creed, we pray to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but perhaps it feels like we're still learning something new, like Nicodemus. We think we have a handle on God, or a handle on Jesus, or a handle on the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Trinity still remains a mystery, and it affects our faith and maybe even serves as a barrier to a deeper faith.

But maybe that's our problem: we are trying to comprehend something that instead of being learned needs to be experienced. Our attempts to think ourselves into a deeper faith often trip us up, like it tripped up Nicodemus, who, as a Pharisee, was more concerned about the laws of the Torah than he was about experiencing the God from whom they came.

I think one of the reasons that the most famous verse of the whole Bible, John 3:16, was actually a direct quote from Jesus to Nicodemus is because Jesus wanted him to stop trying to comprehend and start trying to experience the mystery of God. For God so loved the world—loved you, Nicodemus—that God gave God's only son for you—so that everyone who believes—not everyone who understands—not everyone who has a handle on Jesus—but everyone who believes with a full heart in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life.

Whether we fully comprehend or understand God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity is not nearly as important as experiencing it. And because God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one, when we experience one, we experience them all.

We *experience* the Trinity when we believe the reason that God sent Jesus—not to condemn the world, as it says in John 3:17, but that the world might be saved through him—was God's way of assuring our forgiveness and salvation. Not ever worrying about your salvation or God's complete and utter forgiveness through Jesus, sealed with the Holy Spirit, *is* experiencing the Trinity.

We *experience* the Trinity when we take in the truth that we are adopted children of God as it says in our reading from Romans today. One interesting interpretation of John 3:16 is "For God so attached to the world, that God gave God's only son...." In the first-century Mediterranean culture, love was really about attachment, to a group or to a person, and so Nicodemus would have heard what Jesus said as "God so wanted attach to me that God sent God's son for me."

As an adoptive parent, I know how crucial our early attachment to Tae was. Nothing else mattered during those early weeks following Tae's adoption except attaching ourselves to him. Nothing else matters to God but attaching Godself to us, and God chose to attach Godself to us through the Son and the Spirit. This isn't something to be comprehended but to be lived – to picture and believe in God attaching Godself to you through Jesus, through the Spirit, to the point of making you God's own child.

Now I want to say a word today about the vision Isaiah had in the first reading we heard today, because I think it also relates to our experience of the Trinity.

Isaiah's understanding of God was so high, lofty and surrounded by seraphs, and his understanding of himself was so low—"I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." But God didn't ask Isaiah to gain a greater understanding of God, to comprehend God better, but rather God desired Isaiah to have an experience of God. God sent a seraph who touched his lips with a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs who said to him, "now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

When you come forward today to receive communion it might seem a bit awkward, but I'm going to serve you communion with a pair of tongs—both so we can adhere to the state requirements of not having direct physical contact between servers and recipients and not having you take food from a communal container—but also so that you can experience what Isaiah experienced: forgiveness of God served to you from the altar with a pair of tongs, and when you take it back to your seat and it touches your lips, just like Isaiah, your guilt will depart and your sin will be blotted out. And you too, will have experienced the Trinity.

This God of wonders loved you so much that God chose to come to you in every way possible, in every relationship possible, so that you could experience the entirety of God—Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. And if God through Jesus and the Spirit could want that even for a Pharisee, God most certainly wants it for you. Amen.