

May 30th, 2021

Year B; Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 6:1-8

John 3: 1-17

John 3:1-17

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."

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

We gather on this rainy Sunday on a day that is rich with designations. As we opened worship, we honored our national holiday of Memorial Day.

And this day in the liturgical calendar, is both the First Sunday after Pentecost, beginning the long, quiet season of Pentecost, and today is Trinity Sunday.

Trinity Sunday honors our understanding of God as three within one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

But our readings assigned for today do not discuss the Trinity. All we have is the reference in our passage from Isaiah, to the seraphs calling out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts....".

The Trinity is not discussed in our readings because the word Trinity does not appear anywhere in the Bible.

Of course, the words Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, appear numerous times, but the understanding, and hence the name "Trinity" came much later. The doctrine of the Trinity

was developed in the 4th century, but this day to remember the doctrine of the Trinity, did not enter the church calendar until well into the Middle Ages.

This day is the only day in the liturgical calendar reserved to honor and remember a doctrine, an idea, that difficult to define and grasp mystery in our faith, the Trinity. As one commentator explains:

“Trinity Sunday is a heavy lift for preachers. While all other church festivals and holy days mark events, Trinity Sunday is all about an idea. An indefensible, unverifiable.....idea that has animated the church for centuries. God is three. God is one. God is undivided. God appears everywhere. God is now. God has always been.” (JoAnn Post, The Christian Century)

On this day that honors an undefinable mystery, having Nicodemus as the focus of our Gospel reading makes good sense. As you may recall, Nicodemus is part of the learned group of Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, who worked to understand and interpret the scriptures for the people. The Pharisees are often shown in conflict with Jesus, and challenging his teachings, but this Pharisee, Nicodemus, wants to learn more.

Something in him will not accept the majority opinion that Jesus is wrong and a threat, and instead, Nicodemus hears something in the teachings of Jesus that light a spark in him, and he wants to draw close to the source of that spark.

Nicodemus takes a risk in seeking out Jesus, is this why he visits Jesus in the dark of the night? Perhaps, yes, but also, the night, when all has quieted down and one can give scriptures one's full attention, was said by the rabbis to be the best time for study. So, Nicodemus takes on a more perilous study than sitting alone at home with his Torah; he seeks out Jesus after most have gone off to bed, seeking a place to take the questions that will not leave him alone.

Trinity Sunday is worth observing if only to remind us that we too have questions, wonderings, that often visit us also in the dark of the night. Questions that we can ignore in the business and busyness of daylight, but that awaken us in the dark. Can we follow Nicodemus and take our questions to our brother Jesus?

One writer refers to Nicodemus as the Patron Saint of Seekers, the one who allows our aching questions to find voice. So, we follow Nicodemus as he goes through the quiet streets to find Jesus. Nicodemus starts off with a nice introductory, complimentary statement to Jesus. But Jesus does not nod appreciatively, instead Jesus grabs Nicodemus by the hand, leading him into the mystery of God. Nicodemus asks questions then, but his questions only lead to another pull on his hand, and a run down another beautiful but wooded path of words and mystery.

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being 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 finally stops short, panting and out of breath, in the midst of wonder and mystery, understanding less than when he arrived and says:

“How can these things be?”

And this is where we land too on this Trinity Sunday, if we bring our questions to Jesus in the middle of the night:

“How can these things be?”

Why are we humans so kind and so cruel?

Why do we forget daily that each of us is made in the image of God?

Why am I suffering?

Why must folks I love suffer so?

What purpose is in my life?

What comes after death?

Am I loved?

Is God real?

Jesus does not answer all of Nicodemus’s questions, nor does he answer all of our questions. So often our questions do not need answers, but need instead a foundation to stand on, a place to begin, so those questions do not multiply like rabbits in the night, but step instead onto the dry ground of the mystery of God.

And so, Jesus tells Nicodemus, and us:

“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.”

The dry ground in the rising waters is God’s love; our questions will still spring up as life is often difficult and perplexing, but God’s love will ground us, even as we wonder, even as we struggle. And so, on this Trinity Sunday we stand with Nicodemus, yes, Patron Saint of Seekers, Patron Saint of us all as we wrestle with our midnight questions, and seek the dry ground of God’s love.

I’ll end with the words of the commentator who designated Nicodemus Patron Saint of Seekers:

May (Nicodemus) protect the seeker in each of us from condemnation and condescension. May he guide seekers’ steps in the way that leads to eternal life. May he place us in the company of compassionate teachers whose love defines a new community of hope and grace. May he give us courage to dare to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength. (The Rev. Patricia Farris, Christian Century commentaries) Amen.