

“Give strength, O Lord to your people;
give us the blessings of peace.” AMEN!

Trinity Sunday is a good Sunday to take off.
If you're a preacher, that is. :-)

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is important
but leads to very confusing sermons and
the church language makes me just want
to take the Sunday off
because these sermons are
almost never inspiring.

They might comfort the preacher in their ego
by letting us conflate insider language or
stretching metaphors that try
but terribly fail
at explaining the Holy Trinity.

We'd all agree (I think) that sermons
like these ought to be avoided, right?

Sure, we will find that the doctrine of
the Trinity is present here.

Jesus referred to the Father and their is
this talk of being born of the Spirit with Nicodemus.

But, today I believe we need to ponder the
text of relationship building described

in John's gospel, and often not noticed.

So with that in mind, I'd like to share
with you an imaginary letter to Nicodemus
that I read from Claudio Carvalhaes.

Claudio is the Associate Professor of Worship
at the Union Theological Seminary.

What struck me about this letter to Nicodemus was
the truth that we are so very much like him and
that we too say things sometimes,
words that we wish we could take back.

Here is a portion of Claudio's letter to Nicodemus:

"Dear Nicodemus,

I have a deep admiration for you.

I don't know much about you but it
seems to me you have a good heart.

Surely you are a religious leader and a wise man.

I write 2,000 years after you had
this conversation with Jesus.

I am a Christian which means I follow
that precious Jewish [Rabbi] you were talking to that night.

I hope that you would laugh if you heard all of
the ways many Christians talk about
this conversation you had with Jesus.

Often we hear how much you
didn't get from Jesus' message,
how you didn't know this,

how you were afraid [about that] and
[how you] had to hide to talk to Jesus,
how you needed to learn something or
were confusing things you had
studied many years, and
not quite getting what is
necessary to know.

[We can be very hard on you.]

Especially because of your own position as
a religious leader, we judge that you should
have known better about the key things in
that conversation.

You see, we all think, 2,000 years later
that we are as clever as Jesus was!

But, I must confess I really admire that you
went to see Jesus even if it was during the night;
if it was because you were embarrassed or
afraid of what other people would say,
we are just like you.

I've done that too, going to people
to ask things that I should know better.”

[Just the other day, I wondered how I'd
be able to overcome a particular challenge in
my ministry and someone said to me that
with God anything is possible.

These truth words made me second guess myself
as a pastor and I wondered if the
faithful member thought to herself,]
“I thought my pastor knew better.”

The truth is Nicodemus,
we all ask or say stupid things.

[Somehow we let] stuff come out of our mouths
when we should know better.

[What I want to share with you is to say]
“Your questions help us understand Jesus better.

Your concern about being
born again and belonging
have been the bedrock to
the Christian spiritual-material life.

Birth is as much a spiritual event
as it is a material one, and Jesus taught that
there is no distinction between

these two realms.

The same way that above and below are
also distinctive parts of the same reality,
one is not more important than the other
since they complement each other.

In the same way, our mothers' wombs
carry both the Spirit of life and the Waters of life.

For Christians, without water there is
no material birth or spiritual re-birth.

Flesh and Spirit woven into the same body,
all wet by so much water!"

[Nicodemus,] "we read your conversation with Jesus
on the day the followers of Jesus
celebrate the Trinity.

You wouldn't believe what that group
who followed Jesus became.

We call it church.

Amazing things were done by this church,
[but there have been] lots of atrocities, too.

And terrible things have happened to
your own people and I am sorry that I do not
have enough time to write more

about all of that.”

“I mentioned the Trinity - this is a Christian belief
that God is one in three [entities.]

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

You would think this is craziness!

But for Christians, it is how God moves, relates,
dances, and manifests Godself in the world -
always through relations.”

You had a late night “dance” with Jesus and
your conversation teaches us so much
about God and the way God has always
been and how Jesus Christ is consistent
with God and the Holy Spirit.

The relationship that began that night
between you and Jesus is a lot like the way
our relationship began with Jesus.

Some had a touch of fear and kept it secret,
others snuck out to question
the Lord to find out the
information for ourselves, and
there were many times we went
away confused and shaking
our heads at the mystery

of this God who loves us
and the world so,
so very much.

Personally, I am at the place now where
I can appreciate and honor a God that
is not fully comprehensible,
but also One that pursues us
because of deep love.

We use water in our worship and
then God sends Spirit and the two come together
and make something that interrupts
the course we had set for ourselves.

“I must wrap up my letter to you, but
I want to mention something Jesus said to you
at the end because it became one of
the most well-known sayings from Jesus:

“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.”

This unfathomable love has changed the world
for the better but after 2000 years it is often
forgotten or confused by leaders that think
and preach of this as being a future event,

but it can only be made sense
when we remember the promise is eternal life

given to the way we live now.

Our world now is one that loves guns,
money, and selfish power more than it loves God.

And our water is drying up, too.

All of these things have happened because
we have turned our backs on the Spirit of God.

Yet, we are like you Nicodemus and
we do not give up on pursuing
a relationship with Jesus.

You came back to Him and became a public follower
that took risks for the sake of the gospel.

You give us hope that we can do that too.

Hope that a new birth is about to begin in our world
and people are coming together to stand up
with the righteous power to change
hurtful policies and
sideline corporate greed.

You see, we know that the people have the power
and many are becoming open to believe again
in an active and loving God that desires us
to know we are born of the Spirit.

Oh Nicodemus, may we care for the earth,

creation, and each other the way you cared
for Jesus enough to put your life on the line
when you came to him at night and

when you and Joseph of Arimathea went
to take down the body of Jesus from the cross
and then prepared it for burial in a new tomb
in a garden.

That must have been extremely dangerous
for you both but you did it together.

Even two people can have the
power of Christ and do very brave and bold things.

That's the awareness and work of
the Trinity which we celebrate today.

A mothering God,
a mothering Christ, and
a mothering Spirit to move us
forward in action and peace.

AMEN!

References: "The Letter to Nicodemus" written by Claudio
Carvalhaes is in quotations above and the bracketed portions are
my additions along with all unquoted portions.