

Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía
Hempstead, New York
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The Holy Trinity B – May 30, 2021
Isaiah 6:1-8, Psalm 29, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and God's Holy Spirit at work in us.
C: AMEN

Here we are, celebrating the Holy Trinity, on the one week of the liturgical year when we're thinking about "a theological concept rather than a moment in the life of Christ." (Howard, Cameron B.R., "Good and Holy Words," <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/good-and-holy-words>)

We could find volumes written to explain the Holy Trinity. And if we read all of it, we'd still find ourselves trying to explain a mystery – which by definition, can't be explained, because it doesn't have an answer. I don't mean a "whodunnit," like in novels or movies or television programs. Those have answers, if we just follow the clues. But there isn't an answer to a **true** mystery, so we can't explain it.

We talk about God as three "persons" in one being. That's kind of hard for us to understand, because each of us recognizes the person we are as one-and-the-same with our being. I think that this is especially so in the culture of individuality we have in this country. This concept for us is a mystery.

Sometimes we have trouble explaining our faith to people who say that we don't believe in one God, because we're talking about three divine persons. (Not to mention the fact that we describe Jesus as being **both** divine and human at the same time.)

In young people's messages, I sometimes use the example of one person having different relationships to explain it. For instance, one person can be mother, daughter, granddaughter, niece, aunt, etc., all at the same time. She's still only one person, but has different relationships to different other people. But even that is just an approximation. We don't experience existence the same way that God does, so we can't understand exactly what the relationship is between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

And relationship is what is central here. When we are baptized, we – who already were born physically into a human family – become children of God, so we take on a new relationship and become part of what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God when he speaks to Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5).

As Pastor Cláudio Carvalhaes of Union Theological Seminary says,

our birth is as much a spiritual event as it is a material one, for there is no distinction between these two realms, right? 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 rebirth. Flesh and Spirit are woven into the same body, all wet by so much water! Human and natural bodies, water and spirit bodies... .

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity-2/commentary-on-john-31-17-10>) How beautiful! We are simultaneously spirit and flesh, part of God's eternal family and part of God's created, soil-based universe.

As Paul wrote to the Romans, “[f]or all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.” (8:14-15a.)

We are adopted into God the Father's family and, in that way, we are made free to serve the needs of the world, as Jesus, God the Son, taught us to do, and as God the Holy Spirit leads us to do, from one day to the next.

We hear the prophet Isaiah calling out, “Here am I; send me!” to do the work of God the Father among God's earthly family.

We are in the midst today of our troubled world; still groping, feeling our way through the confusion, fear and dismay that the pandemic has brought us, while taking steps to move forward into the lives we once lived – but that now must be different. We have lived through four years of denial in so many areas of life, to a new national leadership that still is being denied by almost half of the voting public as well as half of the elected leadership. We have called out the violence of our country's White culture toward our country's Indigenous, Black and Brown members and now we face the need to change that culture so that it upholds, loves and protects the humanity – and the spirit – of **all** members.

Isaiah was devastated by being a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips as he was in the spiritual presence of the King, the Lord of hosts. And, having been cleansed and forgiven, he was ready to serve.

Paul, having been thrown from his horse taking him to persecute and kill followers of Jesus, was grasped in spirit and forgiven, became one of the foremost proclaimers of the good news.

Nicodemus, one of the leaders of the culture that opposed Jesus' earthly ministry of flesh and spirit, water and spirit, came seeking clarity and explanation, but he found complexity and confusion. Still, however, his allegiance to the Rabbi Jesus, moved him to insist on a trial before the Sanhedrin and he joined with Joseph of Arimathea to provide a tomb for the crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

So how will **we** respond to God's call, "Whom shall I send?" Will we step up to have our sinful lips cleansed to ready us to proclaim the good news? We **have** been forgiven and saved through the blood of the Lamb. Will we use our creativity to envision the means we will use to meet the needs of our community? Will we commit our possessions to render our culture one of welcome, protection, membership and full participation by all people? What will we allow the Holy Spirit do in and through us?

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. C: Amen