

SOMETHING WORTH SAYING

*Now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight oh Lord, our rock, and our redeemer.*

Do any of you ever get bizarre recurring dreams?
Dreams that you really don't want to know what they might mean about your mind?
I wouldn't recommend doing what I'm about to and talking about it this publicly.
If you didn't think I was weird enough already, I get liturgy dreams.
It usually starts out as a typical anxiety dream:
I'm here, in this sanctuary, and I'm usually here behind the pulpit,
and things start going terribly wrong.
I'm trying to figure out where we are in the service,
but I don't have the right bulletin,
then instead of a scripture reading we hear a passage from *Clifford the Big Red Dog*
(Thank you Judy, for not doing that to me).
And I'm wondering what on earth I can say about that,
since about this point I realize that I haven't prepared a sermon!
But apparently no one was expecting one,
since you all started filing out and into the basement
 as I was praying the pre-preaching prayer.
(I wasn't even getting doctrinal or trying to teach you Greek...yet)
I decide to see what everyone finds so much more worthwhile
 than my slap-dash thoughts about a certain oversized canine.
But the stairs are a lot longer and narrower, and don't lead to the basement,
they go up, and so I climb them, and yet with the sense of going deep underground.
At the top? of the stairs opens this subterranean bunker,
which is also a sanctuary.
Description wouldn't do it justice.
Details would probably just make it seem creepy, and that's not what I'm going for.
This has to be one of the most beautiful spaces I could conjure up.

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Even this is does not hold a candle to Isaiah's vision of the divine throne room, though there were a *LOT* of candles.

My dreams are a lot less divinely inspired.

They just provide me a nice metal space to pray in at night.

Another critical difference is that I've never had anything remotely resembling an encounter with a seraph and a cleansing live coal.

Please remember that.

Isaiah has this glorious vision of God, the King, the Lord of Hosts!

The Divine was very much present there with Isaiah, that is,

Isaiah was having an intense encounter with the Divine.

Isaiah didn't simply write up his own opinions of what he reasoned God must be like.

That type of thinking only gets you so far.

God is known to us by his revealing himself to us.

The thing is of course that we typically can't handle such intensity of such a meeting.

Even the seraphim, these angelic spiritual beings with the six wings, use two of those wings to shield their eyes as they proclaim that God is Holy, Holy, Holy.

Isaiah's response is "woe is me. I am lost."

One does not see God and live.

Luckily for Isaiah there was a lot of smoke obscuring his view.

At the same time, there are plenty of instances in the scriptures of certain people meeting God, "face to face," as it were.

It is God Himself that makes this possible. Most chiefly, in the incarnation.

In the beginning of the gospel according to John we read:

John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father*

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and a couple verses later:

John 1:18 *No one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known.*

God wants us to know Him, even if our knowledge of Him is limited.

In both the Gospel and in Isaiah we see God revealing Himself, knowing many people will not take notice.

Isaiah's instructions that the reading stopped short of going into, were to speak to people who would hear but not understand, people who willfully refuse to "understand with their hearts, turn, and be healed."

Reminds me of the Word John speaks of who

"came to His own, but His own people did not receive Him."

And even so, God still speaks through His prophet,

and the Son of God still *"became flesh and dwelt among us."*

You can refuse Him, but He's going to give us the option to know Him,

to receive Him, see His *"glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

The way God has revealed Himself often reflects a certain three-ness and yet one-ness that we've formulated into the language of Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Three in person, one in essence, always existing and acting together.

Saint Augustine, in his work *On the Trinity*,

put forward many analogies to try to explain the Trinity,

and couldn't get any of them to quite fit with Who God has revealed Himself to be.

At one point Augustine wrote

"we say persons, not in order to mean that precisely, but in order not to be reduced to silence."

It is important that we try to articulate God as truly and faithfully as possible.

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How we think about God often dictates how we interact with Him - if at all.

Sometimes the exaltedness and holiness of God

can have us trying to separate Him from ourselves,

or turn our focus to our unworthiness,

forgetting that even this high exalted God cares

even for those who choose not to care for Him,

and that through worship, participating in what goes on at the altar,

He purifies us to turn our attention not toward ourselves, but to God.

In proclaiming a Triune Godhead, we insist that within God is relationship.

That God, independent of creation, is not all self-absorbed preoccupied in Himself, but has to express his being of love.

We affirm that the God revealed in Scripture is the God

whom we believe in and trust and worship.

Even in the difficulty and strangeness of this doctrine,

we proclaim in humility that we are not God, we cannot fully understand God,

and we maintain this belief not because we speculate that if there were a God,

he should be such,

but because we try to allow God to be whomever God is.

You know, that first part of the dream I shared you was a travesty,

a parody mocking what we do here on Sunday mornings.

(We'd do far better with Isaiah's version:

we come to meet God, and receive the cleansing needed to do so.

But even if you don't want to go that far...)

Dreams of often like that, showing us distorted and muddled images of reality.

Sometimes it seems reality does that as well, becoming a parody of itself.

This past Spring semester I was the teaching assistant

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for a class called Heroes and Villains of the Middle Ages.
One of the stated objectives of the course was to consider
what characterized heroes as heroic and villains as villainous.
There was no trick here, and perhaps *that* is what tricked some students.
We live in a society in which sometimes hero gets confused with victim,
sometimes with rebel.
Sometimes villain gets conflated with person with whom we happen to disagree.
Now granted, none of these categories are absolute or mutually exclusive.
It does get complicated in real life.
What makes a hero, but some combination
of bravery, honor, duty, service to others, self-sacrifice.
Huh, sounds like I found some Memorial Day themes here!
We have Memorial Day to remind us what those things are
that we hold to be praiseworthy,
and those who lived and died manifesting such ideals.
This was especially clear in the origins of Memorial Day
being a day of decorating at the cemetery.
It's practically a liturgical action that gives life and expression
to our remembering and our putting straight our values.
The Church keeps today's other holiday - Trinity Sunday - for much the same reason.
Certain things are so important,
we need ways of giving such life and expression to them.
It turns out that the point of Trinity Sunday
is not to trap ministers into saying something heretical,
that just sort of often happens
because the Trinity is a bit much for the human mind to grasp.
And again - no encounter with a seraph and live coal to help me out here.
But some things are important enough to insist on saying anyway.