

Trinity & Memorial Sunday 2018

A Sermon on Isaiah 6:1-8 & Romans 8:12-17

*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.*

It is interesting and odd that the scripture readings for today are both focussed on humanity. Today in the church calendar is Trinity Sunday, so usually we'll read the creation story in which the Father creates through his Word (the Word being a title for Christ) and with the spirit hovering over the waters, or the baptism of Christ when the Father speaks and the Spirit descends as a dove - passages where we see the Trinity most clearly reflected. But not this year.

This year we have Isaiah and his vision of the heavenly Temple, with the smoke and the seraphim creature things singing out Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God of Hosts. (which is by the way where the Trinity is seen in passage. The Church Fathers are quick to point out that Holy is said three times, but Lord remains singular. They're also adamant by the way that God doesn't have a physical form sitting on a throne, but that was the way God chose to explain who he was to Isaiah - as an awe-inspiring king whom even the spiritual beings cannot look on) We see a man witnessing things too great for him, and we see his unclean lips cleansed and sanctified such that he has converse with God.

This year we have Paul telling the Christians in Rome that their flesh is not their master, that they are not obligated to give the flesh whatever it may want, because they have such a high calling - to be children of God. Again the Trinity shows up: Father, Son, and Spirit are named. But the emphasis in this passage is not to explain the Trinity, rather it simply affirms it. Instead this passage is about who we are - children of God.

And such passages are fitting. The observance of Trinity Sunday was instituted to combat one of the earliest and yet most stubborn heresies. The gist of the idea was that Christ, though Son of God is not fully God in the same way God the Father is, namely that he isn't co-eternal. Instead he was a lower level divinity, subordinate to the Father.

You might think that a reasonable enough explanation of things. But there are a couple of quite serious problems that are implied. The first and easiest for us to grasp is the simple fact that it is rational. But God is a mystery beyond our comprehension. In the reading from Isaiah even the seraphim cover their eyes because they too are incapable of knowing God in his

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essence. And in trying to make sense of how in scripture there's the God Spirit and God the Son which both seem to have their source in God the Father and yet God is One God, the answers were speculative and over-rationalized what was essentially best left without clear answers. [Sometimes we think of the church setting in stone what people are to believe, yet so often, the intention is to avoid saying too much and only counter ideas that are harmful to people's spiritual lives]

The other problem was that such speculative answers or ways for resolving the paradox was that these answers did not fit with the experience of God recorded in scripture and experienced in the lives of Christians.

You see, if Christ was not somehow both fully God and fully human, problems arise for who *we* are. Because the Word became flesh, because the eternal Son of God was born as a human person, that humanity itself was joined to God. All of a sudden, what it means to be human has to encompass being the type creature that God himself is deeply and intimately connected to.

The Son of God became man so that man might become sons of God.

This is what Paul was writing to the Romans about.

“You have received the spirit of sonship.”

And so everything that Christ was and did is made holy.

Being born - holy.

Living - holy.

Baptism - holy.

Being tempted - holy.

Sinning - not holy since Jesus was without sin even though he shared in our freedom to do so.

But suffering - that is holy.

Sacrificing yourself - holy.

Death - holy.

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As it says in Romans: we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

It is a high calling indeed, and a great responsibility.

Paul says we are children of God - but not merely children.

When we think of children we think

young, foolish, immature, inexperienced, naive

in need of protection and care,

people we love before they can understand and reciprocate.

All this certainly goes for how we relate to God. But it does not grasp the immensity of this relationship. Paul clarifies by saying that we are heirs.

Heirs mattered a great deal in the ancient world.

Heirs carry on the name, the legacy.

Heirs are groomed, trained, chastised, educated,

and otherwise prepared to step into their role.

One British monk [Pelagius] from the 300s explained this passage saying that the heir “ought to resemble his Father in character” ... and the Father we are speaking of is God.

But it is not a matter for despair when the realization comes that we are not God.

We’re not expected to be God. But it would be good to reflect his character.

And we are not left alone to vainly attempt what is beyond us.

Like Isaiah, overwhelmed with the knowledge of his shortcomings,

in the recognition of sins and repentance, we are given what we need, perhaps not in the form of lip burns from coals from the altar, but in the forgiveness and freedom from sin, so we too may be able to respond to God with a “Here I am Lord. Send me.”

A Greek theologian [Clement of Alexandria] from the 2nd century put it this way:

“We have received the Spirit to enable us to know the one to whom we pray, our real Father, the one and only Father of all, that is, the one who like a Father educates us for salvation and does away with fear.”

“The Lord prepares the will, he also touches the hearts of his children with fatherly inspirations so that they might do good.”

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This child of God business means that we are responsible for our actions and how we live our lives. It seems to me this is more important than putting together any rational explanation for how the Trinity is.

But we're not left there. As Isaiah was purified and given his commission, Paul explains what our responsibility is. He tells the Christians in Rome to, with the Spirit's aid, put to death the deeds of the body. This is not to say that the body is evil - another one of those points all the Fathers jump on. The problem is harmful deeds that the body may convince your mind are actually a good idea. In other words, the mind should be in control and be discerning of which thoughts it acts on.

“God did not make us in his image
in order for us to be bound to the service of the flesh,
but rather that of soul, serving its Creator,
might make use of the service and ministry of the flesh for that purpose.

He tells them further to be led by God, by the Holy Spirit, for that is what sons do. The slave shall fear his master, and the son shall love his father. We no longer need live in fear, but be led forth in love.

Set free by the grace of God from fear, we have received the Spirit of sonship so that, considering what we were and what we have become by the gift of God, we might govern our life with great care lest the name of God the Father be disgraced by us and we incur all the things we have escaped from.

Such is what we are called to do, because that is who we are as human beings. And so we are thankful for those who have gone before us and shown us how this is done. Especially those who have exemplified what it is to live lives of service and sacrifice. All who have lived their lives and given their lives, we find worthy to remember, honor, emulate, and one day, meet again.

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*Now to the One, who by the power at work within us,
is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine,
to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*