

Isaiah 6: 1-8
Romans 8: 12-17
John 3: 1-17
Psalm 29

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St. Peter's Glenside
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Year B

Trinity Sunday

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN

Good morning again, and welcome to you on this rainy and gray Memorial Day as we honor and remember those who died in our name, for our country, and in our nation's wars and also their families and friends who miss and mourn them. We also hold in our hearts this day the more than 600 thousand who have died from Covid 19 and lift up the broken hearts and lives left in their wake. At St. Peter's this morning, we remember Doris Schaffner, who worshipped here for 80 years. The flowers this morning are from her family, who asked that they remain for our worship today after her funeral service on Friday.

Today is also Trinity Sunday and we have three things to ponder: there's the mystery of the trinity itself, the challenge of rescuing that famous passage from John from familiarity and then this is of course Memorial Day, when honor both our valiant war dead, but our wonderful and beloved "Philippians" who merged with St. Peter's four years ago today when their cherished St. Philip's closed.

Confession: shortly after I first arrived here about two years ago, Emily and I were going over a pastoral care list and she mentioned that a couple I'd be visiting were "Philippians." In my naivete I thought she must be referring to "Filipinos." Imagine my surprise then when I sat down with Barbara and Jim Myhre.

I have since come to appreciate and love those of you who migrated to us, although I have yet to really fully comprehend how excruciating it must be to have your church close its doors. But I do sense how hard everyone has worked to make this a genuine marvel of belonging. It's easy to say "All Our Welcome" here as we do as St. Peter's, but these past four years have proved it is really true and I

know Emily joins me in saying that you have blessed us and strengthened us with your love, commitment and faith. We thank God and the Holy Spirit for bringing us together which brings us to the mystery of Trinity Sunday.

I remember walking into a patient's room several years ago at the hospital. A toddler was scampering energetically around the room. His sibling, who'd been recently admitted to the oncology unit, was standing in the crib and insisting on something. Noisy and chaotic, it was a familiar scene. But what happened next was not: I introduced myself as the chaplain and the first thing Dad said to me was this, "So tell me what is it about this Father, Son, and Holy Ghost thing. I've never quite understood it."

Truth be told, it's what I love about chaplaincy: it holds my feet to the fire and I never know what's coming my way when I walk in the door. But equally true -- it's a hard question to answer on the spot. I talked about God having three ways of being in the world and said that the Holy Spirit was often how God *acted in us and among us*.

Trinity Sunday is celebrated the first Sunday after Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended among us. It is the only Feast Day which honors church doctrine and not an event. But while doctrine, the movement of the Holy Spirit is sometimes easy to recognize: for me, it's a deep knowingness, and intuition or often an unexpected blessing: something happens and once it does, there is that "Ah, ha," moment. "Oh, this is what I am meant to do." And often it's very hard to turn away.

Lastly, these words from John, perhaps the most famous in scripture: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life."

If you remember only one idea from this sermon, let it be this: these are words of *inclusion*, of welcome, not *exclusion*. It's been said that when you draw lines about who's in and who's out, remember where you are putting Jesus. John is not drawing a line in the sand here, although this is the text that's been used as a cruel Christian cudgel.

The key, I think is this: Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was one of the Jewish elite. Jesus and his disciples were outsiders. The Pharisees were out to persecute Jesus for his radical belief about God's love. And yet—Nicodemus sought him out. This conversation happened in the dark, because it was dangerous and transgressive.

Jesus said that God loves the *whole world*. It is an embracing love, not an exclusive one that belongs to this group or that. Our faith is not about rules, creeds, and test questions. In the end it's about how we live out the love Jesus keeps offering us and how deeply we *trust* in that love—even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard.

The concluding verse of this passage says: “ God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” And the only way Jesus saved was through love.

Our marching orders are to trust in that, even when it's hard and especially when we don't understand. Episcopal priest author and theologian Barbara Brown Taylor points us on the way:

I had arrived at an understanding of faith that had far more to do with trust than with certainty. I trusted God to be God even if I could not say who God was for sure. I trusted God to sustain the world although I could not say for sure how that happened. I trusted God to hold me and those I loved, in life and in death, without giving me one shred of conclusive evidence that it was so. This understanding had the welcome effect of changing faith from a noun to a verb for me... *Leaving Church, p. 170*

We are meant to be the verbs of Christ. Jesus didn't come into the world to save it with rules and checklists. What saves us is love, every single time. AMEN