

Trinity

Driving home from the Priory for some reason gets our 11-year-old daughter's brain into high gear.

Last week, the question was:

"How do you love God, dad; like you love a relative or a friend or like you love mom?"

Which, when you think about it, is a question that gets right to the heart of the matter.

Is our relationship with God; and more to the point, God's relationship with us

more like a warm, polite and affectionate feeling for a favorite aunty or uncle; a feeling of being close, to be sure, but not THAT close; one that is satisfied by occasional visits and family get-togethers

OR

is that relationship something like this:

"The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills ...My beloved speaks and says to me: 'Arise my love, my fair one, and come away, for the winter is past and the rain is over and gone.'"

Or like this:

"Plead with your mother; plead - for she is not my wife, and I am not your husband - that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts -- I will strip her naked and expose her as on the day she was born"

Or like this:

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn ... you shall no more be termed Forsaken ... but you shall be called My Delight Is In Her and your land Married; For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

Now, lest you think I got those lines out of an old Norman Mailer novel; go read Song of Songs; and then read the prophet Hosea, and then the prophet Isaiah.

It seems that one's relationship with God is defined by one's vision of God.

Some invite God to come into their hearts; but others come to see that all of life exists within the heart of God.

As Christians, our vision of God is shaped by the day we celebrate today: Trinity Sunday; the feast day of the Holy Trinity.

Now, before your eyes have a chance to glaze over; Trinity Sunday really is about answering that 11-year-old's question about how God relates to us; and how we relate to God.

The popular conception of God, especially in the civil religion that passes for Christianity in the United States, is that God is an old white bearded man sitting on a throne in a celestial Las Vegas.

That is not the Christian faith.

Listen to Karl Barth for a moment:

“With the confession of God’s tri-unity stands or falls the whole of Christianity.

This is the **kernel** of the Christian faith, the **root** of all dogmas, the **substance** of the new covenant.

What is really at issue is not a metaphysical theorem or philosophical speculation but the very heart and essence of the Christian religion itself.

In every Christian confession ... the deepest question is this, how can God be one and also three.

And precisely in proportion as this question is answered does Christian truth come either less or more into its own ...

In the doctrine of the Trinity, beats the heart of the whole revelation of God for the redemption of mankind.”

K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, 1.1, 302.

That’s a lot to take in at shortly after 9 a.m. on a Sunday morning; but it really does matter that we do take it in.

It’s why all ideas about God are NOT equally true; and when we so often hear that, “oh, well, we all believe essentially in the same God;” that wish for cheap unity diminishes the power of Christian witness.

Our Mormon friends, for example, have not yet developed a vision of God as Trinity; and it is for that reason that, at least until they do, one wonders how they can hang their cloaks in the Christian wardrobe.

Trinity means relationship.

It begins with God's relationship with God; an effusive, overreaching, wasteful, abundant, extravagant, overflowing relationship of love.

And then God takes all of that into a relationship with creation; a relationship that God; three in one, and one in three, chooses to freely enter into -

so that the sublime beauty of true love might be shared with creatures made from the dust; creatures, you and I, who breathe the breath of God.

And there is this.

Relationships depend on communication.

The first act of God is to speak -

"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the Earth ... God said: 'Let there be light.'" Gen. 1:1.

God speaks to Adam, putting him in charge of all that is (with one exception - "I'll decide what is good and what is evil," God tells Adam - barring him from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) - and seeing that Adam should not be alone, God creates woman - so woman and man may form (at least on the good days) their own effusive, overreaching, wasteful, abundant, extravagant, overflowing relationship of love and, like the Triune God, become one.

God's communication spills out through the prophets, at times adoring and at times bewailing Israel's response to the love of the Triune God.

It spills out in the intimate, indeed, erotic poetry of the Song of Songs; and in the heart-torn agony of Hosea.

It pours out in the birth of the second person of the Trinity; the Son, Jesus; who, because we won't listen to those who came before; comes to show us by his life and example how it is we are meant to live in relationship with each other and in relationship with this God who is One, yet Three, yet One....

It doesn't end with Jesus' life among us; for even today, as we join Nicodemus in the garden; this Triune God continues to sweep through lives and lands, blowing where it will; never staying put long enough for scientists to stick inside a test tube or under the microscope.

God's very Spirit is among us today; speaking sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly, of the intense love affair that God wishes to have with you and you and you; inviting only our "yes," our "I do," if you will --- such is the sense we have of that inexplicable mystery we call God.

And because of that, we are not only a people beloved by a God who goes out and speaks and acts and loves in the world; but we too are called, as God's beloved, to go out and speak and act and love in this very same world.

Today, with Isaiah, you and I stand before the altar of God.

Like Isaiah, you and I have dirty mouths, and we come from a people of dirty mouths.

But as we join Isaiah, here, at the foot of the heavenly throne:

Watch!

Look!

Be amazed!

That same seraph that flies to Isaiah, live coal clenched between tongs; touching his mouth -- that same seraph touches your mouth and mine -- saying:

"Now, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

And when the voice of the Lord asks,

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

May you, today, say with Isaiah to the Triune God --

"Here am I; send me!"

And as you travel on, may you discover, as your companion along the way, the God who is father (and mother), son (and daughter) and yes, the God who is lover too.

+amen