

Trinity Sunday

Today we celebrate the mystery of the Trinity.

This strange, even incomprehensible notion that in one God there are three persons, yet one God.

I love this day because it gives me a chance to chat about one of the most frequent objections I hear about Christianity.

That it's exclusive!

It's narrow and small!

And frankly, the way most of us are taught about the faith, it is!

But that's only because too many Christians refuse to come to grips with the truth of our faith.

Because when we do, what we discover is unimaginable vastness!

Indescribable depths!

Which miraculously reveal themselves in the most ordinary of ways.

It's not for the mind to grasp as much as it is for the heart to discover.

"The boy was 15 when it happened.

His dad, dean of an Episcopal college, is a large, gruff man with a lot on his mind.

The school's baseball field recently bought expensive, high intensity lights for night ball; and the boy loves to throw rocks up at the lights.

Even though they're too high to hit, the boy loves the challenge of trying.

Until the day his dad catches him, yells at him, and warns him to stop.

Which he does, for awhile.

But then he starts again.

And one fine morning, with his friends standing around, he launches a rock that, as soon as it leaves his hand, he knows — it's the perfect throw.

It goes higher than any rock he has ever thrown.

So high that it grazes one of those pricey lights, breaking it, and scattering glass all over the field.

The boy is mortified and warns his friends not to say a word!

And he vows never to let his dad know what he did.

Except that as the days turn to weeks, the secret eats at him.

When his dad jokes around with him, the boy is moody and upset.

Because of his shame.

Because of his secret.

And so he withdraws from his family.

He gets mad at the slightest tease.

He is miserable.

When the misery reaches a point where he can't bear it any longer, he decides to own up.

Dragging himself to his dad's office, the boy knocks softly, and when the booming voice from behind the large desk says to come in, he does.

Head down, stammering, he confesses.

Waiting for the stinging words of rebuke.

For the punishment that is sure to come.

Instead, his dad stands up, and hugs him.

Hard.

Real hard.

As the boy dissolves into tears.

And he is forever changed." The Manger is Empty, W. Wangerin, Jr, modified.

I wonder if this unexpected encounter with mercy, with love, is what's at the root of Jesus encountering Nicodemus today?

Nicodemus, a scholar and religious leader who certainly knows the law, seems to have God all figured out.

And yet, he's clueless when it comes to the true nature of God.

Nicodemus, like so many of us, has God in a box.

And Jesus is about to blow up that box!

As they stand there in the dark of night.

The rich, sophisticated scholar — and this strange man from Galilee.

Nicodemus knows the headlines about Jesus.

Those stories about changing wedding water into wine.

Healing that fellow born blind.

Telling the lame man to walk, (and lo and behold, he walks!).

Then there's that mess just a few days ago, what with Jesus tossing all the pay day lenders and pawn shop owners out of the Temple, causing quite a stir.

Poor Nicodemus!

An honorable and sincere man, who is completely dumbfounded when Jesus tells him, in so many words, that — as we are, we cannot encounter God.

It's a tough thing to swallow, so I'll say it again.

As we are, we cannot encounter God.

It's not only Jesus saying it.

Isaiah and Paul realize it too.

Something has to change.

A hot coal, says Isaiah.

Exchanging flesh for an invasion of the spirit, says Paul.

A new birth, says Jesus.

And there's something else that's a shocker.

Especially for us modern, intellectually sophisticated, rational gang of geniuses.

Isaiah's hot coal?

Paul's invasion of the spirit?

Jesus' new birth?

These aren't things that WE do.

These things are done TO US!

Like a dad's unexpected embrace - when we expect a beating.

Isn't that how giving birth works?

You don't give birth to yourself!

Being born doesn't require too much.

The one doing all the hard labor is the one **giving birth!**

And how beautiful those two words are, for **birth** truly is a **giving**.

It's a messy, all consuming, completely focused, kind of giving!

When a woman is in labor, good manners and sweet talk fly out the window.

Replaced by a glorious agony of sweat and tears, of shouts and screams.

With bodily fluids flowing everywhere.

Which many of you sitting here, or at home, know all about!

You've been there!

So you probably don't need to hear more about it from me.

But here's the point.

We so often think of God as something like that seemingly uptight dad sitting behind his big desk at the Episcopal college, who seems to be all prim and proper.

Definitely not a guy I want mad at me.

But Jesus says, that's not what God is like at all!

Jesus says that God is more like a woman in labor.

That God is laboring to give birth to a people who are struggling to emerge into that which is our true destiny.

And yes, it's painful!

Sometimes, it's even agonizing!

But that's what love in action is all about.

Can we be quiet just long enough to allow Isaiah's hot coal to touch our lips?

Can we put "my way" on the shelf for just a moment — and open ourselves to God's way?

Can I recognize my need to deflate my big ego — and ask to be born anew?

If the answer is yes, then perhaps we too might stumble into this joy-filled life of love in action.

Maybe it's so hard to wrap our heads around who this God really is because when we get all dressed up in our Sunday best, we'd rather focus on rules and regulations, than risk getting soaked in the afterbirth of the Holy Spirit!

While that soaking might ruin our clothes — think what it does for the soul!

And there is this.

If God is mother, as well as father, then we, as God's children, are destined to be like God!

We are destined for union with God!

If childbirth gives us a taste of that joy here and now, (just ask any mom about birth pangs the moment her precious child is placed in her arms) we can only marvel at what awaits us in the world to come.

So maybe what Jesus is saying is this.

You are acorns, destined to become mighty oaks!!

So slide down that slippery slope of God's boundless desire to have us all!

Take a chance on God!

Knock on her door!

Stand before him with whatever regrets or guilts or fears you may have!

Because if we don't, if we insist on keeping God in a box, then, like Nicodemus, we might miss the indescribable joy that comes from being loved.

"Because the stunning truth is that love is the reason for creation.

There is no other God.

No hidden agenda for human beings.

Before the creation of the world, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit pour out their love upon creation.

Inviting us to share and know the life of Three in One, and One in Three.

For this, the cosmos come into being.

For this, the human race exists." Kruger, *The Shack Revisited*, 62 (paraphrased).

This remarkable, freely given, gift!

The divine becomes human — so that humans may become divine.

Such is the truth of our existence.

We can't see it.

We can only feel it.

Like the wind.

Like hope.

Like love.

+amen