

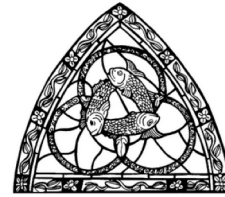
Trinity Sunday – May 31, 2015

Isaiah 6:1-8

Canticle 13

Romans 8:12-17

John 3:1-17



Holy Times Three

A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Port Townsend, WA

Maybe St. Augustine's answer best, "If you think you understand [God], it is not God." Enough said, don't you think? Maybe not. We wrestle and struggle trying to understand who God is for us. We seek to find glimpses of God in the world around us... and, yes, we are stunned into silence by the beauty of a sunset, in visions of true liberation, in movements of peace... and, yes, we are wracked with questions and doubt about God's very existence, at times, when we are touched by the misery of immigrant boat people, when wailing voices of grief reach our ears, by the knowledge that incomprehensible acts of violence are happening in places far and near. Through shifts and changes and uncertainty we struggle to get a glimpse of God as we seek to put a name to God... and we have three...the names of the blessed Trinity... Father, Son and Holy Spirit... Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.... three in one and one in three... This may satisfy some, but nagging questions remain.

The year that King Uzziah died was a time of tumult and uncertainty. King Uzziah was a great leader, and maybe one of the last great ones to lead the Southern Kingdom of Judah in its long and protracted war with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It was a time, a moment, when hope felt elusive. At this pivotal moment the prophet Isaiah is given a full-on ravishing experience of God. Isaiah saw God sitting very high on a throne. So large, so grand was this vision that all Isaiah could see of God was the hem of God's robe filling the whole temple. Dazzling creatures called seraphs attended God, creatures that are named in the Bible only once, only in this scene from the book of Isaiah... creatures with six wings... two that covered their faces, two that covered their feet, ...though feet are simply a euphemism for their most private parts... With the other two wings the seraphs flew, and they called to one another a in song that filled creation: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Is 6:3)

Isaiah was humbled by this display... feelings arose... "unclean" "unworthy" ... Yet here he was in the presence of the Most High. Isaiah speaks his humble truth... and one of the seraphs touches his lips with a live coal in an act of purification.... absolving and curing Isaiah from any sin and sense of unworthiness. When God asks who shall be sent, who shall go for "us" says God... Isaiah, without hesitation, says "send me!" "Send me!" this simple yet awestruck servant who has come close to the hem of God's robe... and has known God's presence... and has been cleansed through and through... all is changed... send me.... here I am...

Who is this God of whom we, today, get but a glimpse? We look to scripture, and we look at the world around us. Walter Brueggeman, in a 2013 interview with Krista Tippet in the podcast “On Being”,¹ offers five images of God taken from the writings of Isaiah:

God is a “demolition squad”

God as a safe place for poor people who have no other safe place

God as the giver of the biggest dinner party you ever heard of

God is the powerful sea monster who will swallow up death forever

God as a gentle nursemaid who will wipe away every tear from every face...

We know God most intimately in Jesus. We feel God God’s presence in this gathered community, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the breaking of bread. Holy, holy, holy.... three time is the right number.... three times sounds so right... Father, Son and Holy Spirit... Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer... Christ Alive! God seeking us, loving us, calling us... the Holy Spirit filling us with life... and guidance... Gifts from God working in us to serve the God of life in the world. In wonder and awe we open to the life force within us and when we connect with the divine pulse, we can do nothing else but answer, as did Isaiah, “Here am I, send me!” It is about God with us and in us, blowing through this community of faith... stirring our hearts, sparking our imaginations, animating our bodies. It is about God within us and with us, stirring us awake such that we cannot help but join the heavenly chorus... singing “Holy, holy, holy.” One God, three persons. Beyond comprehension. God so big that we catch only a glimpse of the robe that fills the temple... and the hem is all that we see. The six-winged seraphim flit and dazzle. God is here. God is here in a form that is pure presence, transforming presence, a presence that is beyond Words, known in the very physical, earthy creatures of bread and wine. I would like to share with you a poem by the Episcopal priest Michael Coffey entitled “God’s Bathrobe”:

God’s Bathrobe, by Michael Coffey

God sat Sunday in her Adirondack deck chair
reading the New York Times and sipping strawberry lemonade
her pink robe flowing down to the ground

the garment hem was fluff and frill
and it spilled holiness down into the sanctuary
into the cup and the nostrils of the singing people

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<http://www.onbeing.org/program/prophetic-imagination-walter-brueggemann/475>

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one thread [of the flowing robe] trickled loveliness into a funeral rite
 as the mourners looked in the face of death
 and heard the story of a life truer than goodness

a torn piece of the robe's edge flopped onto
 a war in southern Sudan and caused heartbeats
 to skip and soldiers looked into themselves deeply

one threadbare strand of the divine belt
 almost knocked over a polar bear floating
 on a loose berg in the warming sea

one silky string wove its way through Jesus' cross
 and tied itself to desert-parched immigrants with swollen tongues
 and a woman with ovarian cancer and two young sons

you won't believe this, but a single hair-thin fiber
 floated onto the yacht of a rich man and he gasped
 when he saw everything as it really was

the hem fell to and fro across the universe
 filling space and time and gaps between the sub-atomic world
 with the effervescent presence of the one who is the is

and even in the slight space between lovers in bed
 the holiness flows and wakes up the body
 to feel beyond the feeling and know beyond the knowing

and even as we monotheize and trinitize
 and speculate and doubt even our doubting
 the threads of holiness trickle into our lives

and the seraphim keep singing "holy, holy, holy"
 and flapping their wings like baby birds
 and God says: give it a rest a while

and God takes another sip of her summertime drink
 and smiles at the way you are reading this filament now
 and hums: It's a good day to be God

It has been said that....

....the Christian mystic Theresa of Avila found difficulty at first in reconciling the vastness of the life of spirit with the mundane tasks of her Carmelite convent: the washing of pots, the sweeping of floors, the folding of laundry. At some point of grace, the mundane became for her a sort of prayer, a way she could experience her ever-present connection to the divine pattern which is the source of life. She began then to see the face of God in the folded sheets.²

May we be strengthened, through faith, in a holy mystery infused with all love, all possibility, and visions of a better way.... That we may live boldly and kindly in the world, knowing that we are here on this earth to voice God's passion for justice, and that we are here to embody God's loving presence, and that we are to drink deeply from God's living waters, and sing praises to God with the whole our lives.

"Holy, holy, holy." One God, three persons. Beyond comprehension. God so big that we catch only a glimpse of the robe that fills the temple and the hem is all that we can see. The six-winged seraphim flit and dazzle. God is here. God as ravishing presence... God in the folding of sheets, in the turning of soil, in the simple gesture of caring touch, in the breaking of bread. God calling us to be born anew. God beyond Words. Holy, holy, holy.... what else can we say?

Amen...

² (Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, New York: Riverhead Books, 1996, pg. 282)