

Romans 8:12-17 and Isaiah 6:1-8  
doctrine, devotion, discipleship  
Trinity Sunday May 27, 2018  
Roy W. Howard

Today is Trinity Sunday and that presents a challenge for the preacher. It's not because a sermon is an inadequate form to convey the mystery of Triune God. Any sermon **alone** is an inadequate way to express anything. It is only one movement in worship during which the people of God offer praise and gratitude. The whole thing – music, prayers, silence, song, sermon and the sharing of a common meal – is important. *The main challenge is to talk about the Trinity at all. Most people consider it obscure or, more politely, irrelevant.*

*I don't think it's obscure or irrelevant and I want to say why but first a story.*

A few years ago, I was driving in the District, confident I knew exactly where I was going. My GPS confirmed my confidence. It was at night in an unfamiliar neighborhood. No worries. My confidence in my skill, my knowledge and especially the knowledge of the GPS didn't waver. Turn after turn, the night got darker. I carried on confidently; until I reached a dead-end where I thought my destination would be. Yup; the street ended, and not where I expected. That night I eventually found my destination, the old school way by telephone.

Why do I tell you that? Because there are some who think that with enough study you can fully comprehend God, the Triune One, who exists as three persons – distinct yet undivided - in a communion of love for one another, overflowing into all creation. **That's a dead-end.** God always eludes our grasp. That doesn't mean abandoning God or study anymore than it meant abandoning my quest to find my destination. I had to find another way.

Likewise, there's a way of knowing the Triune God that is akin to wonder. This way of knowing has more in common with poets who teach us to pay attention and open our senses. In her book, *Small Wonders*, Barbara Kingsolver, says "*I am a scientist who thinks it wise to enter the doors of creation not with a lion-tamer's whip and chair, but with the reverence humankind has traditionally summoned for entering places of worship: a temple, a mosque, or a cathedral. A sacred grove, as ancient as time.*"

We could follow Kingsolver's lead and approach God, as with all life, with wonder and faith, even love not with a desire to grasp and reduce God into correct religious facts.

**Bird watching is an example.** It's a spiritual practice for me. Like prayer, birding requires *patient attention, curiosity, a listening ear and searching eye and general knowledge of birds*. Similarly, approaching God **open-hearted, wondering, filled with curiosity, listening and watching for signs**, you may begin to live into the large mystery of Triune One who loves us, who in Jesus entered into the flesh of our existence and even now sustains us in the spiritual life.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century German Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said, whimsically, "the heart of the Trinity is this: the Father laughed and gave birth to the Son who then laughed back at the Father and gave birth to the Spirit who laughed again and gave birth to all of creation", including human creatures born to laugh with joy in God and whose destiny it is to give life and laughter to the world.

For his part, Saint Paul contrasts the way of the flesh with the way of the Spirit. I think the way of the Spirit is the way of wonder. **To live in Christ is to live in wonder, to be dazzled gradually by God's mystery.** It's to live openhearted, humble in the face of all that remains *necessarily* beyond our grasp. Think about it: if you could grasp God fully enough as to relieve all your questions, than what kind of god would this be in the end? Small, exactly the size of you. And what becomes of faith and wonder? Vanquished; squeezed away in your tight confident hands. To depend on your self-understanding alone is to live in the flesh.

Isaiah the prophet is a man once confident who is now radically aware of his fallen state. He trembles before God's presence shaking with the knowledge of his sin. He is caught in the temple with a flaming coal on his lips as the angels sing Holy, Holy, Holy. Caught up in wonder: all he can do is pray: Here I am! Here I Am! Send me. Saint Paul testifies to the Spirit who unites our lives with Christ. **It's all quite mysterious and filled with wonder, gratitude and praise.**

Remember Nicodemus? He cautiously meets Jesus alone at night. Rather than send the seeker away, Jesus tells him of the Spirit, who unpredictably blows like the wind, and causes ever believer to be changed – **born again!** Nicodemus – bless his heart – can only cry out, **"I am old! How can I get back in the**

**womb?"** Crestfallen, vaguely aware that change is utterly necessary, Nicodemus listens. Jesus tells him the Father's love for the whole world, wide and deep enough to send his own Son to save everyone. It suggests we experience the undivided God as a **parent's love**, as a **Son who forgives us**, and as **the Spirit who transforms our lives Christ**.

***It's an unbroken circle!*** The practice of discipleship increases our dependence on the Spirit who sustains our lives in Christ. The Trinitarian way of life in the Spirit is filled with **love** for the lost, **mercy** for the fallen, and **grace** for the sinful.

***Day by day, one day at a time, we "run, rise, and rest" in God.***

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.