

Trinity Sunday Holy Communion

Epistle: Revelation 4:1-11

⁴ After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

² And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

³ And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

⁴ And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

⁵ And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thundering and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

⁶ And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

⁷ And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

⁸ And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

⁹ And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

¹⁰ The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹¹ Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Gospel: John 3:1-15

³ There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

² The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

³ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

⁴ Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

⁵ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

⁸ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

¹¹ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

¹² If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

¹³ And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

¹⁵ That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Introduction

The Trinity is the foundational doctrine of Christian theology, distinguishing our faith from all others. Millard Erickson, in his book *Christian Theology*, sums it up by stating, “It is concerned with who God is, what He is like, how He works, and how He is to be approached (Erickson 2013, 292). As a Christian, understanding that God the Father loves us and sent His son to earth to teach us, show us the divine attributes of God, and finally to die on the cross and rise for our redemption inspires humility and gives our faith meaning. God the Holy Spirit as a

teacher and comforter is also a powerful reminder that God is with us always, in every situation and at all times.

Many analogies have historically been used to try to help people understand how the Trinity functions and how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit can be one in substance eternally existing as three distinct persons. From the Athanasian Creed, “The Father is Almighty, The Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty, And yet they are not three Almighties but one Almighty”. The concept of The Trinity is difficult to understand, and I am sure, over the years, many of us have listened to a sermon trying to explain it. Even our great church father, St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), while writing his treatise *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity) struggled to find a logical explanation for how God could be three Divine persons, each fully God, sharing the Divine essence or nature, in one being.

Legend has it that St. Augustine was walking along the beach, struggling to understand the mysterious and complex nature of the Trinity. He saw a small boy digging a hole in the sand and running to the ocean with a seashell, carrying water back to fill the hole. Augustine asked, "What are you doing?" The boy replied, "I'm going to empty the entire ocean into this hole." Augustine laughed and said, "That is impossible!" The boy, often said to be an angel, looked up and said, "It is no more impossible than for you to fit the mystery of the Trinity into your small mind." While this story is not found in any of his writings, it is symbolic of how

even the great theologians of our time struggled with some divine truths that can be too immense for human reasoning to comprehend, encouraging faith, wonder, and reverence.

On Trinity Sunday, we move from the *actions* of God, which we have celebrated from Advent through Pentecost, to the *nature* of God. It is the only feast day in the Anglican calendar dedicated to a doctrine rather than an event.

Body

In our Gospel reading for today, (John 3:1-15), we find Nicodemus, a Pharisee of high rank and high intellect, struggling to solve the riddle or to "calculate" who Jesus is. Jesus responds by showing him that God is not a logic problem to be solved, but a way of life to be shared. Nicodemus represents the best of human religion and intellect at the time, and he tries to start a dialogue based on logic: "*We know thou art a teacher, come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him*" (John 3:1-2). Nicodemus approaches Jesus with logical credentials and he is looking for a *teacher* to enlighten his existing framework. In the Anglican tradition, the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus that follows in verses 3-15 are not viewed as an abstract debate, but as a foundational teaching on the nature of Christian initiation through Holy Baptism, the necessity of divine grace, and the mystery of the Incarnation.

Jesus tells Nicodemus, “*Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). Nicodemus does not understand this concept as he is once again using logic and trying to define Jesus through his own understanding of what being born means to him. Jesus continues in Verse 5, “*Unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and which is born of the spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “you must be born anew”*” (John 3:5-8).

Anglicans emphasize that the Greek word *anōthen* carries a dual meaning: "again" and "from above, or born again from above". Although the conversation was most likely in Aramaic, John chooses to use a very specific Greek word in his account to show what Jesus meant in His teaching. That this word has two meanings, from above and again or a second time, is the key to understanding the irony of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus' intent is to communicate the Divine truth that a person must be born "from above." He is telling Nicodemus that a person must be born of God/Spirit, a heavenly, divine act of transformation, to enter the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus hears the term and interprets it as "again" or "a second time". He responds with a literal, fleshly interpretation: "*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?*" (V.4) Nicodemus represents the human perspective; he is locked in the literal and physical. Jesus is trying to lift him into the "spiritual"

and the divine. You cannot enter the Kingdom of God through religious rigor, academic credentials, or any human effort. It must be bestowed *from above*.

In verse 5, Jesus links this birth to “water and the Spirit.” Anglican theology, rooted in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and 2000 years of Church tradition historically interprets this as a clear reference to Holy Baptism. Water represents the visible, outward sign of Baptism. Everything else, including death to sin, new birth, and being made the children of God is the inward and spiritual grace in Baptism.

Jesus continues in verse 8, “*the wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes, so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit*” (v.8) Jesus refers here to “The Wind of the Spirit”. The Trinity is not a static, distant object of study. The Holy Spirit is an *active* Person of the Trinity, like the wind, invisible but undeniable in its effects. To be “born of the Spirit” means your life is no longer moved by your own internal compass, but by the “wind” of God’s grace. It is the movement of the Trinity *into* the human soul.

Nicodemus continues to take the words of Jesus and apply his own filter, still not grasping what the meaning is. Jesus admonishes him by saying “*Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet do not understand this?* (v.10) Jesus continues by saying

to Nicodemus, *“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things. No man hath ascended up to heaven but he who hath come down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (V. 12-15).

These verses describe the Incarnation, and the Person and work of our Saviour in such a way that we begin to understand our Lord as the One who descended to live among us. The Christian faith asserts that our salvation is found in the physical reality of the Word-made-flesh. Jesus uses the Old Testament story of the Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:9) as foreshadowing of His own mission. Just as the Israelites had to look at the very symbol of their affliction (the snake) to be healed, we are called to look upon Christ crucified. Anglican theology views this as the ultimate expression of the Incarnation: God enters into our brokenness, our sinful existence, so that He might carry it to the Cross and transform it. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that religion is not a ladder we climb to reach God; it is a new life that God reaches down and breathes into us. It begins with being born again, from above, and the new God given, spiritual life is sustained by the power of the Spirit and is anchored in the "lifting up" of the Son on the Cross, who remains our only bridge between heaven and earth.

Action/Conclusion

Trinity Sunday is our invitation to stop watching the mystery from the outside and to begin living from the inside. We are invited into a life that is as deep as the Father's love, as wide as the Son's sacrifice, and as powerful as the Spirit's wind. Do not be like Nicodemus, standing on the outside trying to understand how it can possibly make sense. Many analogies have historically been used to help people understand how the Trinity functions and how God the Father, God the Son, and the God the Holy Spirit are three Persons, and yet share one being, sharing in one Divine nature. I encourage you to step beyond trying to fill the hole with water and open up your hearts to the Holy Mystery. As Christians we worship, we pray, we interact with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as we worship and glorify one God. In a classic statement from Augustine, "So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not [or there are not] three Gods, but One God".

While we may not be able to explain the doctrine of the Trinity perfectly, we will experience The Trinity every time we receive the Eucharist. As we approach His table, we are called by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

