

Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 8:12-17

We can't get through Trinity Sunday without talking about The Trinity, right? But the big catch about talking about the Trinity is that nobody really knows how to do it. Every time you think you've got it all wrapped up it pops undone again and it is very difficult to understand it. People always get hung up about how things can be the same and how they can be different and it just gets to be a magnificent headache, a bit like what Nicodemus is going through talking with Jesus. If you thought the gospel reading was easy to understand, then I would be interested in talking with you because that is a pretty convoluted piece to follow. But, I know we have three families who can really help me, okay. Now I don't know how embarrassed you would feel if I asked you to come up here or are you more comfortable sitting where you are? Okay, you are more comfortable sitting where you are.

Now you each have a small child, is that Dakota back there that I can see? Hi Dakota, Dakota you can help me, you come down here, you're big enough to help me. Okay, we've got to help these grown-ups understand and that is often hard work. This is Dakota, everybody say hi to Dakota. "Hi Dakota." Now come here and look around here. Dakota is a son. You're a son, right? And who are those folks back there? "My mom and dad." Your mom and your dad. Who is that sitting beside your dad? What's that relationship to him? "My mom?" And what is she, his what? I know she gives the orders, but – "his wife?" Yes, his wife, right. And who is that sitting beside her? "Husband." So he is your dad and her husband, right. She is your mom, he's her husband, you got that? Right now dad is two things, right? He is a husband and a dad, and your mom is two things, she's a mom and a wife. I got that much right, didn't I. Now I am here, okay. I am their pastor and I am your pastor, right? So I am their pastor, they're my parishioners, like you, so that means your dad is a parishioner, a dad and a husband. Okay? And the lady beside him is a parishioner, his wife and your mother. Got it? So there actually three things in one, you got it? That's the Trinity. Thank you, Dakota.

You know the interesting thing; see what the Trinity's really about is two things. It's first of all about relationship. Relationship with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit and the relationship with one another here and every person we encounter when we go away from here. That's the first thing that it is all about. And the second thing about it is that it is about love. Not, (kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss) love, but caring love. Love that cares about one another so that if there is something we can do to help, we help. If it's the Trumps that are breaking their heart right now at the medical center, it's us praying for them. And if we know them, being around for them and if we live near them maybe taking them a pie or food or something. It's about putting some money in the offering plate so that we can do things for other people and do things for people in our congregation. It's about caring and understanding and most of all the love that we're taught about, it's beginning to understand ourselves that we're not perfect and because we're not perfect we can't expect anybody else to be perfect. But, God who knows all and sees all is well aware of our imperfection and loves us anyway. That's what the Trinity is about.

Now I guess I am supposed to preach a sermon, right. Double-whammy. Have you ever wondered, you know when I re-discuss with Pastors, the first thing that strikes me is the actions taking place at night? And when I think about that I don't think about Nicodemus sneaking under cover to see Jesus, I know a lot of people say that. But I think more about Nicodemus being troubled. I don't know how it is for you folks, but I find it's when I wake up in the middle of the night, when it is quiet and still and dark that's when the things I really don't want to worry about actually pop up and I start worrying about them. Am I strange or is that the way it is? So you see when I see this is at night time, I think that maybe Nicodemus has got something to worry about and he has. You see, he is a Pharisee. Now the first thing about Pharisees is they are really good people, you know they get a real bad rep from some preachers. They are sort of cast as the bad guys, but they are not bad guys at all. They are people like you and me; they try to do the right thing. In fact, they're probably a little different from you and me because they try to get every one of the 600 and some rules about living as God's people; they try to get the whole caboodle right. Nicodemus is not just an ordinary Pharisee; he is the leader of the Pharisees. I like to think he is wrestling at night knowing what he knows about God, knowing what he says about Jesus, and he is worried. Where does he fit into all this? How does he understand it? Does he have it wrong, does he need to get something straightened out?

It's a bit like a boy called Dolph, well I shouldn't say a boy, he was twenty-six. But Dolph lived in a small Texas town. His father was a pastor. Dolph was loved by everybody in the congregation until he sang in the choir. That was just perfect. People liked him and he was a lot of fun to have around, but there was only one problem, Dolph had Downs Syndrome. And for Dolph the problem was often figuring out how he fit in and what he could do and what he couldn't do in the limitations of his illness and all that sort of thing.

Which brings us to us. I think sometimes in our deepest, darkest worries at night we wonder where we fit in with God. Is all this stuff we have been told about him loving us true? Does he really, are we really okay with him? The first thing we start thinking about is all the reasons why we shouldn't be okay with him. Isn't that the way it goes? Is there something else we should be doing? Is there something that we need to sort of get things straightened up for ourselves? Well Nicodemus tries to get things off on a good footing, you notice how complementary he is, Oh, you're a wonderful teacher, you must be a man of God or you couldn't do all of these wonderful things, and wham, Jesus hits him with a whole slew of instruction. I don't know whether Nicodemus was ready for it or not. I've read it all my life that text and when I look at it I cringe to try and make sense of it all and what poor old Nicodemus must have been thinking. But there are some interesting things that are said in there and there are things that have bothered Americans immensely, and the first thing is, being born above or being born again. For some people that's a code word that they are fitting in and they've got it right. Nicodemus isn't so sure. What does it mean to be born again? You know, he says to Jesus, you can't reinsert me into my mother's womb and bring me out again, that's impossible. Then Jesus says something that is very interesting, he says no, no, no, no, no, you've got to be born again of Water and the Spirit. Now if Nicodemus had his wits about him, he might have caught on, but it was night time and he was worried. But what he might have caught on to was John the Baptist. Do you remember what John the Baptist was up to? He was in the Jordan River busy washing people. What was he washing them for, but to get them cleansed of their past and turned around again to facing God. You must be born Jesus says of Water, just like I was. And then he says the tricky

bit, you must be born of the Spirit. Oh, Lutherans don't like touchy, feely stuff. What does that mean, how can we understand it? Well in a baptism you notice we use oil. Have you noticed that? We use a little container of oil. We anoint the baby with oil in the form of the cross on the baby's forehead. Do you remember what we say? We use the baby's name and we say "Child of God you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever." Born of Water and the Spirit. We have questions, don't we? But, at least that is spelled out for us.

So it was for Dolph, things were spelled out for him when he struggled with his life and what he was able to do with his limitations and the things he wasn't allowed to do, and one afternoon, his father you see was a pastor in the church in the small town. One afternoon he was out in the car with his father while his father did pastoral visits and Dolph said to his father, Dad, why can't I drive the car and his father said to him you know Dolph, you know why. And Dolph said yea, I guess I know why, in Texas you can't have a license if you have Downs Syndrome, and they went on about their visits for the afternoon. And sometimes when we hear the mercy of God and those sorts of things being said to us, we wonder just how we'll fit and we're inclined to hear all sorts of rules and regulations about our faith and how we should live it and what we should do as to whether we should be Christians and sometimes we get very concerned about what are the rules, what are the right ways to be doing things.

About a couple of weeks after Dolph had been out visiting people with his father, a guest preacher came to town, actually he was quite a famous theologian and quite a famous preacher, at least in Texas and that is a big state, so I guess that is something. So anyway, he came to preach at Dolph's town, met Dolph, met his parents, met the family, stayed with them over the weekend and preached and spoke and on the Sunday evening after the service he spoke to them about all sorts of things of the faith, they had a potluck supper and everybody was fine and then they all sat around with the dessert asking questions of the speaker. And Dolph put his hand up, well it seemed as though the speaker just didn't see Dolph at all until right at the end, the speaker saw him and he said yes Dolph what's your question? And Dolph said, when Jesus looks at me, what does he see? Does he see me? Or does he see Downs Syndrome? The whole congregation was on the edge of their seats in absolute silence holding their breath waiting to hear what this great preacher would say. He looked down at Dolph and he said, Dolph, what Jesus sees is the son of the pastor who sings in the choir with a congregation of people who love him. And Dolph said, I really like that answer. As the lectionest was finishing, notice what Jesus says, to the poor man who is fretting over getting everything right with being a Pharisee and everything else. Look what Jesus says, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes; and I like to change believes because then we want to make that into something we do, rather than whoever trusts, will be saved. You see Jesus came into the world not to condemn us, not to judge us, not to write an evaluation or a report card on how well we've kept the rules, but he came to save us. Why? Because his Father loves us. How much? Just the way we are without having to make any change at all. You see the real truth tonight is that God loves you so much he gave his Son for you. If you trust that, what a difference it makes to the way we're free to relate to God, and Christ and the Holy Spirit and how we're able to relate to one another.

Knowing that we've got a loving parent and that all we're asked to do is to love and care for one another. What a great blessing. Don't worry about getting it right. Take the risk of loving one another as God in Christ has loved us. Amen.

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