

Isaiah 6:1-8
John 3:1-17

Trinity Sunday

June 7, 2009

"Knowing God"

God wants to be known, and we can know Him. Jesus addressed God as "papa" when he prayed, and he instructed us to do the same. Jesus prayed knowing that God was close to him and he was close to God. He said, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me ..." (John 14:11). Directly after that Jesus told his disciples that "... the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." There you have it: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is how we know God. This is the knowledge and faith that sets us apart from Jews, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses. This is the blessed Trinity we speak and sing of. We're not talking about three gods, but of one God, the Almighty, who has allowed us to know him up close in His son Jesus, and guides us through the Holy Spirit.

[When you hear "God in three persons" don't be confused by the word "persons." The word does not mean the same as when we speak of each other as persons. Person comes from the Latin *persona* which refers to the mask put on by actors in order to play different parts. The word was taken by early Christian people to express the forms of God's *activity*, w/o destroying God's unity. But today the word person might lead us to think of God as three different people. It might be better to think of the three ways God is active and present. Karl Barth said "The Trinity is a description of God's three ways of being God."]

"Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabbaoth" - Lord of hosts. Thus did the ancient prophet Isaiah describe his experience in the awesome presence of God. An experience so overpowering that the only way he could describe it was in terms of a mighty king sitting upon a majestic throne; with awesome power, cloaked in dignity and majesty. This is the God who stretched out the heavens above the earth and brought forth life.

This is also the Mighty One who sits on the throne of justice and demands righteousness. If we perceive God solely as a benevolent and gentle grandfather, we are more likely to treat our sin superficially, and worship halfheartedly. [We will live by our standards rather than God's standards.] Yet a reverent fear of holy God will dramatically affect how we live. Though Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, he knew that one day he would stand before God to give an account for everything he had done (2 Cor. 5:10). It is true we are God's adopted children and that we are fellow heirs, even friends, with Jesus (Rom. 8:16-17; John 15:14-15), but we are not His equals. He has forgiven us, but we are still His creatures. He is God, and we are not!

With Jesus we are brought into direct contact with God, so that to meet Him and be judged by Him, is to meet and be judged by God the Father. The disciples realized that this Jesus whom they had known, was truly God. Peter said, "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." In Christ, God knows what it is to be betrayed, unjustly condemned, insulted, crucified, buried....

Why did I get this infection when I have to go to work and kids to care for? Why can't I find work when others do? Why did I get this disease when it passed by others? Why can't I be a better Christian? Why did he let me down? Why did she go away? Even Christ, hanging on the cross, cried "My God, why have you forsaken me?" He even experienced death. In Christ we can see that God *has* walked a mile in our shoes. How else could there be the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Jesus said to Nicodemus, ". . . the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Christ is exalted on the cross, but it is not the suffering we exalt. [If Jesus had come only to participate in our suffering then our cross on the steeple, in the sanctuary, would be merely underlining the disaster we are all participating in.] There is something beyond the cross. God raised him from the tomb to tell us that true living comes when we are willing to risk dying. Is there some aspect of your life that's holding you back from true living? Is there something in your life that needs to die so that you and others may live?

Jesus (God among us) spoke of the Spirit when he met Nicodemus. The Holy Spirit is the divine presence with Christians. Oh that we would know His divine presence here. When Jesus talked with Nicodemus, that night long ago, he said something about being "born anew." What did he mean? How can someone be born all over again? I know a lot of people these days are put off by the term "born again Christian." [Maybe you've heard or met some folks who bandied that term around, but their lives told a different story. Unfortunately some "born again Christians" are still born. They have not grown in the faith since that point when they first met Christ for real. They haven't been on the road to sanctification.] Still, that doesn't mean Jesus' words about being born from above are invalid. There is something to this. It's about how the Spirit really does change your life so that you see the world from a new perspective, a biblical perspective. For some people it happens suddenly. For others gradually. Yet the genuine conversion continues, so that one matures in Christ (sanctification). And the Spirit instills us with the courage and strength to be his witnesses in this world.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8: 12-17).

God whose majesty fills heaven and earth. God incarnate, born of the flesh and teaching new birth from above. God the Spirit, dwelling in our church to give it vision and strength, and power-filled lives to believers.

In every case God's purposes are the same: not to condemn, but to save you and me shape us in His strong and loving image.