

HOLY TRINITY, B

Isaiah 6:1-8

Church

Romans 8:12-17

John 3:1-17

Psalm 29

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June 7, 2009

There's an old story about the little girl who was busy working with her crayons at the kitchen table. Her father leaned over and asked, "What are you drawing?" "I'm drawing a picture of God," she said. "But honey, nobody knows what God looks like," said her father. "Well, now they will!" the little girl said.

Drawing a picture of God. It's intriguing to imagine what that picture would look like. Our children are willing to attempt it, but we adults are more likely to talk ourselves out of it before we even try. After all, how can you capture the essence of God in a picture, or ten pictures, or ten thousand? But let's let our imaginations run loose for a moment...

If I were to draw a picture of God, I might begin by drawing a many-colored whirlwind, spinning all the elements of creation out from its center. Swirling out of the whirlwind, you might see trees forming, animals taking shape, rivers flowing, flowers blooming in all their bright and beautiful colors. Or instead of a whirlwind, I can imagine picturing God as a craftsperson, with two great, strong hands lovingly shaping a lump of clay into the form of a human being, a bird, a landscape. Or I can envision God as a proud artist surveying the natural world, God's masterpiece in all its glory, smiling as beachcombers marvel over the pounding surf and tourists stare mesmerized into the Grand Canyon.

If I took another tack, I might picture God through the lens of human relationships. God might be a mother cradling a baby, or a father delighting in his child's first steps... God might be a fire fighter risking his life to save someone trapped in a burning building... God might be a paramedic tending to an accident victim... God might be a tutor patiently teaching a child or adult to read.... God might be a friend offering encouragement over a cup of coffee... God might be a coach continually challenging her athletes to do their best... God might be an architect painstakingly mapping out plans for a new world.

Any picture we come up with would capture some quality of God – but no one picture could portray God completely. We need all these varied pictures to help us understand God fully. And that's in part what the Bible and the teachings of the church provide for us: portraits of God, glimpses into who God is.

Today, on Holy Trinity Sunday, we take time to explore one set of God-portraits which church tradition has handed down through the centuries. This set of

portraits includes three pictures of God that have their basis in scripture: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Many people find it confusing to think of "God in three persons," God being three and yet one. Actually I find it confusing, too. So for me it's most helpful to think of the three faces of the Trinity not as three separate beings but three different perspectives on God's being-- three different ways to understand the God who defies definition.

Tradition tells us God is the Creator, the Parent of everything that is, the Artist of the universe. God is the one who gave birth to us and all living things. The Creator is that dimension of God that is infinite and awe-inspiring, brilliant enough to create the cosmos. And God the Creator is not yet finished with the task of creating. God is still drawing us in to be partners in making new things and making things new.

The Trinity's second portrait of God is the one we find in the gospels -- God incarnate as Jesus Christ, God become flesh and blood, God walking and working and laughing and crying along with all human beings. This is God the Son, God our brother, who has been our companion through the darkest, most painful stretches of human experience. Even more, this is God who bled and died on the cross for us, who rose from the dead to lead us to eternal life. This is God our Redeemer, the one who saves.

A third portrait of God is the one we celebrate at Pentecost: God the Holy Spirit, God who is a continuing presence with us every day. The Holy Spirit is God's unseen but tangible power that is at work in the Church, uniting Christians in faith and mission. God the Holy Spirit is like a mentor, a confidante, or a coach as we live out the faith. The Spirit encourages us and also challenges us.

It makes sense to me that we need at least these three portraits of God. And as I think of all the different ways God has revealed Godself to us, my greatest response is to be thankful. I can see that God has a persistent will to reach us, no matter what it takes... It shows me how dedicated God is to connecting with human beings in every possible way, through all these expressions, throughout all history.

There's a famous icon that depicts the Holy Trinity. It was painted by a monk named Andrew Rublev in 1425. The icon pictures the Trinity as three angels seated around a table, as if they are sharing a meal or a conversation. Their eyes meet across the table and they tilt their heads toward one another, forming a holy partnership or friendship.

Now, in the Easter Orthodox Church, the icon is used as a focus for personal meditation and prayer. As a person meditates before the icon, the holy painting becomes a "window" through which God can enter that person's life. And this particular icon does have a way of inviting you into the scene.

As you look closely you come to realize that there is an empty place at this table where the persons of God are gathered. And you begin to realize that this empty place on the front side of the table is reserved for you. It's there so you can enter and join into communion with the persons of God. This icon calls to you, to take your place in the divine friendship, to share a meal of fellowship with the Godhead, and come to know the God who creates you, the Savior who redeems you, and the Spirit who sustains you. (Clergy Journal, May/June 89, Revs. Nancy & John Topolewski)

This particular icon of the Trinity has influenced many people over the centuries. The spiritual writer Henri Nouwen confided that

"During a hard period in my life when prayer had become nearly impossible and fatigue had made me the easy victim of despair and fear, a long and quiet presence to this icon became the beginning of my healing. As I sat for long hours in front of Rublev's Trinity, I noticed how gradually my gaze became a prayer. This silent prayer slowly made my inner restlessness melt away and lifted me up into the circle of love, a circle that could not be broken by the powers of the world. Even as I moved away from the icon and became involved in the many tasks of everyday life, I felt as if I did not have to leave the holy place I had found... I knew that the house of love I had entered has no boundaries and embraces everyone who wants to dwell there." ("Living in the House of Love," Henri Nouwen, *Alive Now*, Sept/Oct 1991)

What Nouwen experienced was the mystery of the Trinity-- the mystery of God who enters our lives to live with us forever. God wants us to carry this awareness wherever we go. To know that we do have a place at God's table. To feel that we *belong* to God and dwell with God, now and forever.

Even this morning, you and I are drawn deeper into God's circle of love. Even today, you and I sit down at table with God in all God's fullness. We share a meal with God the Three in One-- here at this altar, in the meal of Holy Communion. We share a feast with our Parent God, who is also our Savior Christ, who is also the free-flowing Holy Spirit, and who draws all people into an eternal circle of friendship and peace. We may not ever be able to explain it or fully understand it, but we do receive it. And for this great mystery, and for our part in it, we give thanks. Amen.