

And here we are at Trinity Sunday. This is the last big feast day of the church until All Saints Day on November 1. That's a long stretch! And this is the twelfth time I have stood before you, the parishioners and friends of Trinity Lime Rock and tried to say something meaningful about the Trinity. Some years I've sought to explain it. Some years I've tried very hard to ignore it (because explanations mostly fail to explain this holy mystery.)

Some years with the help of the youth of our parish, I've given examples, imperfect metaphors, to demonstrate the Trinity. Those years are the most fun.

And that reminds me of a little story from one of my favorite daily reflection books by Philip Parham. I've adapted it slightly.

A new missionary came to the island where an older missionary had worked long to convert the natives to Christianity. The new, young whippersnapper had a PhD in theology and was ready to help those poor, uncomprehending savages to understand the true nature of God who is in three persons. Forgive the stereotypes, but having been a missionary myself this is directed at me too.

The new missionary started to speak, but he did not speak the native language. The old missionary was set to translate for him. The young man said a number of scholarly things about the One in Three and Three in One. The three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are uncreated, unknowable and incomprehensible.

One of the native wise men of the tribe asked the old missionary to put the young one's speech into their own words. The old missionary told the native "He says that he is very glad to be here." Both men smiled. ⁱ

Well, just because one can't explain an eternal mystery doesn't mean we can't talk about it. And what is most true and most real about the Trinity is our own experiences of the God who created us, who has saved us from sin and death, from ourselves frankly, and who enlivens our hearts day by day. No amount of rev-splaining can make our spirituality more clear than what we see, hear, feel, taste and smell.

Isaiah was in the Temple for worship at the time of his call to be a prophet. He used his senses to discern God's presence that day. Chief among those may have been smell and touch. He may have smelled flesh burning, his own, as a hot coal touched his lips. He was transformed into the purified spokesperson and translator for God's own true word. Like I said last week,

there were prophets who would suffer any consequence, but no matter the cost they would speak the truth. Isaiah's lips were purified for the truth by fire and he became ready to accept God's call to him saying, "Here am I. Send me."

Isaiah experienced heaven itself in the Temple, as he heard angels calling to one another saying holy, holy, holy. And we echo those words in one of our best loved hymns for the Trinity; Holy, holy holy. We'll sing it in just a little while. And we echo those words every week in our Eucharistic feast when we pause in the prayer of blessing to also say or sing: holy, holy holy.

In terms of experiential faith: People who attend our Trinity Bible Study tell me that they have never heard God's voice so clearly as when we are studying the Word together. One of our lay preachers who you will hear this summer has told me that the experience of putting together the sermon and leading worship was quietly, deeply inspiring. If you hang around God's word, you will feel God's presence.

And who knows if visceral experience will lead us to say, "Glory be! That is amazing!"

Another example of the advent of faith is found in Paul's writings. Imagine you are a person suffering in difficult circumstances. To make it more timely, imagine you are someone living in a place in the world where people are still falling ill from Covid all around you, and you have no vaccine, and no way to isolate yourself from your family and neighbors. And your shop has been closed down so there's no way to make a living. How would you feel if then you were notified that you had received an inheritance that would allow you to rise out of your suffering and make you safe, protected and at peace. You found out you were heir to a fortune, previously unbeknownst to you. The panic of fear subsides and you would be simultaneously relieved, thankful and ready to face whatever comes your way. Might you cry, "Glory be!"

This is what Paul wants his Roman congregation to feel in their gut upon hearing that they are heirs, joint heirs with Christ to receive the riches of the Spirit, the joy of knowing one is safe and sound, and protected by a wealth of blessings. "We suffer with Christ so that we may also be glorified with Christ. Well, Glory be!

The third character we meet this morning in the Bible is poor, uncomprehending Nicodemus. We can't comprehend the Trinity. He can't comprehend being born again. It's science, he might tell Jesus. You're born once! What are you talking about, Jesus? But, over the course of John's Gospel, Nicodemus does get the metaphor that Jesus was using. He becomes a faithful Christian. That's what you get by hanging out with Jesus.

Our dear sister in Christ, Alice Tweed, died last Saturday and will be laid to rest this next Saturday, June 5th. She loved Trinity Sunday. It was a favorite church feast complete with plenty of food following our traditional singing of “holy, holy, holy.” She hung out with Jesus in her own way. Taking care of the Trinity altar week by week and taking care of us with food and laughter in the kitchen. That was her way of drawing near to God. And now her reward is that she is with God. Glory be!

A final note this morning: In a moment we will recite the Creed as part of our Sunday worship. But don't use that time to take a break today. We will use a portion of the Athanasian Creed in which Christians from long ago sought to definitively understand the Trinity . I think God will forgive us for just using a portion of it this morning. The Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you.

ⁱ adapted from A. Philip Parham - *Letting God*, May 25.