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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

May 30, 2021

Trinity Sunday, Year B, Revised Common Lectionary

[Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

[Psalm 29](#)

[Romans 8:12-17](#)

[John 3:1-17](#)

“I heard the voice of the LORD saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here I am; send me.’”

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How can an *I* be a *we*?

It kind of brings up the olden days, doesn't it? The “royal we.” We might hear it in old-timey TV shows about kings and queens; Queen Victoria saying, “We are not amused.” Royal proclamations used to start this way: We, Alexander III, by the grace of God Tsar of all the Russias, do solemnly pronounce such and such.

There's certainly something grand about it: this idea that a person is so majestic, so important, that just a singular pronoun isn't enough. But most of us would find it laughable for someone to talk that way today, no matter how powerful. We know a human being is just a human being, whether it's Jeff Bezos or Joe Biden or just your uncle James.

But what about God?

There are a few places in the Bible where God talks this way. “Whom shall *I* send, and who will go for *us*?” in our reading today from Isaiah. There’s a similar line in Genesis where God says, “Let *us* make humans in *our* image.” Certainly if there’s anyone entitled to the royal “we,” it’s God. But there are hints throughout the scriptures that this is more than just a fancy way of talking. That that unusual occasional plural might communicate something about who God is.

God is one: that’s the most fundamental truth about God in the Hebrew scriptures. “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” In a world of polytheism that was a radical truth. And yet throughout the Hebrew scriptures there are hints that God’s oneness has some complexity to it. We hear about God’s Word, a kind of aspect of God by which God creates and acts in the world. We hear about God’s Wisdom, personified as a kind of figure, feminine in gender, one with God yet also distinct somehow. We hear about God’s Power. We hear about God’s Spirit. There’s a kind of multiplicity we might read in these scriptures. And certainly Christians have always read the Hebrew scriptures that way, starting from the very beginning as they tried to grasp the significance of who Jesus was. They reached for those concepts of the Word of God, the Wisdom of God. They started to understand God still as one, yet one in a way that had multiplicity in it. They started to know God as Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Last week at Pentecost we celebrated the gift of the Holy Spirit to the newborn church. And we might see a kind of chronological unfolding there: God the Source of all things, the God of Israel, sends Jesus, God the Word, God the Son, and when his earthly work is complete we have God the Spirit, and now we have the Trinity, so let’s celebrate that. And there’s some truth to that idea.

But it can also lead us astray. Because Christians don't believe the Trinity is a kind of successive three-act drama where one comes first, one comes second, one comes third. Christians believe the One God, known in the Hebrew Scriptures, has been the Triune God all along, the Spirit and the Word intimately involved as far back as creation and beyond. Father, Son, and Spirit breathing life into all things, setting the people of Israel free from slavery, inspiring the prophets, bringing the Word incarnate to earth to love and liberate us.

St. John tells us in a famous verse that "God is love." And one thing the Trinity means for us is that God truly is love: that there is love even within the very heart of God; that God is community as well as unity, joined in a kind of intimate dance of mutual joy throughout all eternity.

So we have this hint at Trinity in this verse from Isaiah. "Whom shall *I* send, and who will go for *us*?" says God, this rollicking fellowship of Oneness and Threeness and infinite glory. And Isaiah volunteers. It's as if he just can't help it. As if the vision of God's glory and love is just so much as to draw him in.

Probably the most famous of all Russian icons is the icon of the Trinity painted in the 1400s by Andrei Rublyov. It's the icon on the front of today's service bulletins. It shows the Trinity in a famous story from the book of Genesis where God appears to Abraham in the form of three angels. And there's a lot to be said about this icon: the figures, somehow masculine and feminine and both and neither all at once; their gazes at one another that carry the viewer's own gaze around the circle; the symbolism of the colors and the landscape features in the background and the chalice on the table; and on and on.

But what I notice when I think about Isaiah is how this Trinity icon puts the Holy Three as tablemates. And then, like most Eastern icons this one is in inverted perspective. Instead of converging into the background in a vanishing point, the parallel lines converge out toward the viewer in a way that draws you in. It's as if to say that God the Trinity is engaged in a kind of dance of endless love, but that love doesn't stay put—it reaches out of the picture to pull you in too. There's a fourth guest at this table—it's you.

Just as Isaiah was drawn in by the vision of God's glory, so you and I are invited to be drawn in. Not that we're members of the Trinity. Not that we're God, heaven forbid. I don't want that job. But rather that the love among the Trinity is so powerful and so beautiful and so alive that it can extend to us too; that we're invited to share that love, as beloved and beautiful creatures that God has made. And more than that: because scripture also says that we are made in God's image. And so if God is both individual and community, if God is relationship, so then are we.

This past year we have seen in unforgettable ways just how connected we are to one another. We have locked down and stayed home to flatten a curve. We have worn masks to protect one another. We have done things not out of concern just for ourselves but because we know we are bound to each other. And we have also seen how wounded our connections to each other are. We've seen how the pandemic has allowed some folks to take up new hobbies while others have had to keep working for others to survive. We've seen how black and brown folks and their white allies have worked in new ways for the liberation of everyone, because everyone is made less when anyone is cut out of community.

The Trinity isn't just an abstract doctrine. It's the beating heart of our connectedness to God and to one another. It stands over against the kind of radical individualism that says, forget you; I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul. And yet it also stands against any kind of radical collectivism that would flatten the infinite value of every individual. Each person of the Trinity is wholly God, and each individual human being is in the image of the Triune God.

In the Trinity there's no contradiction between individual flourishing and communitarian flourishing. Because the God who is Three in One and One in Three has created a world where we are all most fully ourselves when we are most fully connected to one another. Here at this table we are invited to join as tablemates with one another and the Holy Three. And then we get sent out into the world to love and serve in the name of the Lord.

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? God asks. What will you answer? If you've been baptized, you've already given your answer in your baptismal covenant, the covenant we renewed last Sunday at Pentecost: I will, with God's help.