

Sermon: Trinity Sunday

The Rev. Mike Wernick

May 31, 2015

Year B
Isaiah 6:1-8
Canticle 2
Romans 8:12-17
John 3:1-17

There was a time... when baptisms were considered private affairs... some wealthy people who had chapels on their country estates... and we can imagine those on Downton Abbey... would summon the local parson for an infant baptism... maybe before tea... on Saturday or Sunday afternoon... honoring religious tradition... and maybe expectation... but doing it more on the Down Low...

In our evolving Protestant theology... we've come to see the sacrament of baptism as something we do together... in community... affirming our own baptismal vows... baptizing new believers... or *trusters*... and welcoming them into God's family...

Some of you will remember me saying that my daughter and I were baptized on the same day... Rachel was two... I was thirty-seven...

During the rite... I was aware of feeling a bit self-conscious... after all... I had only been in this community for about three months and didn't know the people very well... During coffee hour... where there was a cake that said *Welcome to God's Family*... I felt welcomed... But all that afternoon and into the evening... I felt an incredible sense of peace and well-being... something I'm certain I couldn't make up or convince myself of... it would be hard to say exactly what it was... perhaps the presence of the Holy Spirit was heavy on me... but it was like being deep in meditation or centering prayer... and carrying that feeling out into activity... it was like being a silent witness to all that was going on around me... even while being actively engaged in it...

But there's a very subtle aspect to this business of adult baptism... that I think often goes overlooked... it's one of surrender... or submission... it's one that flies in the face of all that the world values... autonomy... self-reliance... power... and prestige... it's a subtle aspect that acknowledges our dependence... our reliance on others... and God... our vulnerability... and our powerlessness...

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night... in the dark... in secret... at this point at least... he doesn't want anyone to know that he's associating with the God-man... he doesn't want anyone to think he's incomplete... he senses something... feels pulled by something... but he doesn't want to be seen as weak... doesn't want to be found out...

During the months leading up to my separation and divorce... my priest found two therapists with whom I could meet... both seemed well-qualified... one was right there in the small town in which I lived... the small town in which my wife's family lived... the town in which she'd been born... that in some ways she owned and in which I was more a visitor... the other one was thirty miles away... just over the Indiana state line...

When we're uncertain at first... when we need to test all kinds of waters... before we dive in... before we commit... before we surrender to something other than ourselves... bigger than ourselves... we need to gather courage... reassure ourselves... maybe take the safer road...

I chose the therapist over the border... during the thirty mile drive... I felt like Nicodemus... leaving familiar Pharisees... coming in the mystery of night... and asking questions of this one therapist who could help birth me... who could further the re-birth of my baptism... that contained in the process of psychotherapy... there was new life... and part of this new life came from being able to trust what God was saying to me...

And I think part of the reason I felt how I did on the day of my baptism... was because I had been born again from above... part of the reason I felt how I did... was because this

new me... was no longer carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders... part of the reason I felt that way... was because I now felt more perfect... in my imperfection...

Next weekend I'll be away... presiding at the marriage of my former sister-in-law and her fiancé... but in the gathered community of family and friends... what we'll really do... is acknowledge something which has already occurred: the commitment these two have already made to each other... oh... we'll sign some papers so they'll be able to file joint federal and state tax returns... but we won't perform magic... we won't do anything to which they have not already agreed... and when I was baptized... I didn't do anything either... to which I had not already agreed... it started almost a year before... when I sought a relationship with Jesus...

There are two great images that embody the process of health... integration... and unity... one of them is a mobile... with different two dimensional shapes... hanging by fragile threads... and connected by vertical supports... and when the Spirit blows on one of them... the others are affected and move too... there may be some delay... the impact may not be immediate... but when one moves... they all will move...

The other image is one of dancing... when... to keep it simple... dancing represents the relationship of two people... and when these partners know the steps and the sequence of their relationship... the dance is seamless and fluid... but if in the relationship there's some kind of unhealthy behavior... some dysfunction... and then one person seeks greater emotional... psychological... and spiritual health... when one person seeks new life... and the other doesn't... then the dance can become choppy... people can trip... or step on each other's feet... until the other person learns the new dance steps... But always... when we get healthier... we will change the dance steps... when we get healthier... some people will get healthier and change in the dance with us... and some will dance away... that's part of what Jesus meant when he said: *Whoever comes to me... and does not hate father and mother... wife and children... brothers and sisters... yes and even life itself... cannot be my disciple...*

I think the first time I ever saw the reference to John 3:16 was on a televised baseball game... when I knew what it said... all I could hear was what felt like the threats of televangelists... but I do believe v. 17... that God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn it... but to save it through him... and what that means... is that we're constantly being invited to grow in trust... the way Nicodemus did... by driving thirty miles away and finding a safe ear to hear us... and doing that... until we can do it right where we are... and in the light of day... whether others are watching or not...

We acknowledge today... the dance of the Holy Trinity... but this dance is not just for the Creator... Incarnate Word... and Sustainer... the dance is for us too... and I think the way we are invited into that dance... is by rejecting the notion that someone must always lead and someone must always follow... by rejecting the cultural values associated with leading... like power and prestige... and by embracing cultural qualities associated with following... like vulnerability and simplicity... I think we enter the dance... by embracing the simple love and joy inherent in the dance... sometimes leading and sometimes following... sometimes giving what's needed and sometimes taking what's needed... but all from God's abundance...

In fact... we're already in the dance... we began dancing the moment we knew there was dancing... we may have thought we needed to wait for a particular rite... but that's just our way of publicly acknowledging in community... something that already exists... a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace... which already exists... we just dance into that truth more and more...

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs... the seraph touched my mouth with it and said: *Now that this has touched your lips... your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out...* Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* And I said: *Here am I... let me dance!*