

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Trinity Sunday – Year B

RCL Readings – Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

ACNA Readings – Exodus 3:1-6; Psalm 93; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Introduction. In the Western Christian tradition Trinity Sunday is the first Sunday after Pentecost. It is one of the few Sundays in the Church Calendar that is devoted to a Christian doctrine. God is a mystery, and no concept of God is more mysterious than the concept of the Trinity. While the word *Trinity* is not in the Bible, the mystery of God’s nature is. “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honour of kings to search a thing” (Prov 25:2).

Common Theme. Western culture is unfortunately increasingly defined by unbelief. Statistics continue to reveal dropping attendance in churches, and those choosing to register themselves as “non-religious” in surveys outweigh those professing a form of faith. To a world defined by unbelief, how then do you define God, much more so, in the form of a Trinity? Perhaps that is a task we do not actually have to accomplish. One of the more profound truths of theological history is that the early proponents of the unique unity of God were indeed pious, zealous, monotheistic Jewish people. They could see the Ancient of Days, the “one like a Son of Man” (Dan 7:9-14), and the Spirit of Elohim in the Scriptures and still say that the LORD is one. The mystery is left to be pondered, not solved.

Isaiah 6:1-8. King Uzziah was one of the few good, godly kings of Judah who then had a tragic end when he was struck with leprosy. While the earthly king had fallen, Isaiah was caught up in a vision of the Heavenly King. Around the throne of God are angels called *seraphim*, in Hebrew literally “burning ones.” *Seraphim* are only mentioned in the Bible in this chapter of Isaiah. These angelic beings call to one another, not to God. They declare among themselves, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (קֳדוֹשׁ, *kadosh*). Why repeat this declaration three times? In Hebrew, emphasis and intensity are communicated by the use of repetition. God is infinitely holy, and this holiness is emphasised through repetition. While this is not a proof text of the triune nature of the Godhead, it does provide a glimpse of God’s character. He is uniquely holy. Likewise, with the *seraphim* of Isaiah’s vision, we personally need to realise and accept his holiness and mysteriousness. We do not have to understand God completely to appreciate and declare his holiness to each other and those God has placed around us.

Psalm 29. This is a psalm of pure praise to the Lord. There are no appeals to mercy, requests for forgiveness, or admission of guilt. Verse 2 instructs us to worship God in the “splendour of his holiness.” Beauty and holiness are two subjects that are not usually connected together in our current culture. We get a hint of the intensity of the holiness of God, a holiness that is attractive, magnificent, and alluring, that invites us to worship and bow down before the Almighty. The psalm describes God as king of creation, with his power and authority connected to his word, the “voice of the Lord.” The phrase “voice of the Lord” is repeated seven times, each time emphasising God’s strength and majesty. While the power of God can indeed be a destructive force, the psalm ends with a quiet confidence that God’s strength is passed on to his people, who are blessed with peace.

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Romans 8:12-17. God is described as a father for the first time in Deuteronomy 32:6. God is the Father of all, obviously not in a biological sense, but in the spiritual sense in that he created all and everything. Paul reminds us in Romans 8:14 that one of the attributes of sonship, that is, being a son of God the Father, relates to being led by the Spirit. God desires an intimate relationship with us, the relationship of adopted sons to a loving father. The mystery of salvation involves the work of the Spirit that is poured out at Pentecost, described here by Paul as the Spirit of adoption. The mystery is that we are more than just “saved”; we become part of a holy family. All participants in the Trinity, or the Godhead, are mentioned in this short passage, while not describing God as a triune being. The Spirit bears witness that we are now children of God the Father and inheritors of those blessings along with the Messiah.

John 3:1-17. The night encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus is a familiar story for many of us. Even non-Christians can quote John 3:16 verbatim. Like the Romans 8 portion, this passage in John’s Gospel contains all participants in the Godhead. During the ministry of Jesus, one of his common titles to describe himself is the Son of Man. The character called the Son of Man is first introduced to us in the vision of Daniel 7. He appears as an eschatological character, distinct from God the Ancient of Days, standing in heaven. There he is adorned with authority, worshipped, and given a kingdom. Daniel does not seek to explain how or why the Son of Man is worshipped or how he relates to God. The mystery is left to be pondered, not solved. During the Second Temple period, the Son of Man became a messianic figure amongst some Jewish commentators and particularly the Dead Sea Scroll community. In John’s Gospel, God the Father’s love and compassion for the world he created compels him to send the Son in the act of redemption. Yet the Spirit also plays a role in bringing people into the kingdom through “new birth.” The unity of God is reflected in the active participation of redemption by all aspects of the Trinity. It is mysterious, but the mystery is also beautiful in the splendour of holiness. Come, let us worship the Lord.

ACNA Addendum

Exodus 3:1-6. Moses, who has been shepherding in Midian for the past 40 years, encounters God in the burning bush. When God first speaks to Moses, he calls him by name. Moses may have fled the palace of Egypt and become an obscure forgotten shepherd, but God had not forgotten Moses. Mysteriously, the Hebrew text interchanges the personal name of God, YHWH (יהוה), and the “Angel of the Lord” (יהוה מלאך) without explanation. Why God chooses to include the Angel of the Lord in revealing himself to Moses is not known. The encounter reminds us of the mysterious nature of God, but that the King of the Universe would delight himself to speak with man is just as mysterious.

Psalm 93. “Pride comes before the fall” is a well-known saying from Proverbs 16:18. Yet for all the negative connotations of the word *pride* in humanity, pride is a characteristic of God himself. How can

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this be? Verse 1 declares that “The Lord is king, He is robed with majesty.” This is the common English translation. The Hebrew actually says the Lord is clothed with “pride” (תִּפְאָרָה). How is it that he is dressed in pride and what sort of pride? The Psalm continues to describe the Creation, the Throne of Heaven, and the House of God, and the Lord is higher than all these wondrous things. We the descendants of Adam cannot be prideful, for our pride too often leads to evil intentions, but the Lord can. He can even wrap himself in pride. He made the world, and he alone can boast in its beauty. After all, when he had made the world he did say it was good. God can sit on the throne in heaven and be majestic, and his pride leads only to good. When Moses was on the mountain with God, he asked to see God; instead, God said he would show Moses his goodness (Exod 33:19). The Lord reigns and his reign is a good one.

Further reading: For a good treatment of the theology and philosophy of the Trinity, please see the following article by Dr William Lane Craig: <http://tiny.cc/wlcraigonthetrinity>

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.