

## **Acts 2:1-21**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

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; send me!”\*

## **Unity in Three** - May 30, 2021

*Isaiah 6:1-8*

Being human is about being in relationship with each other. From the moment we are conceived we are in a relationship with our mothers. Once we are born and enter the world, our network of relationships expands. Most of the time, a father enters our world. There are doctors and nurses to care for us. Oftentimes there are relatives of all kinds moving in and out of the picture: older brothers and sisters alternately trying to love us and experiment on us. Grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, babysitters, caregivers, teachers: a parade of people whose names we must learn and whose expectations we must grasp so we can somehow get along.

The world gets bigger and bigger. Friends, and those who are not friends. Other people we don't know in person but have power to influence our lives: officials, police, even presidents. At some point, we realize that we are not merely in relationship with other human beings, but all kinds of other things, living and not living.

Most of us have had a pet or two: dog, cat, guinea pig. They are not human, but they often very much become part of our world. Even inanimate objects: toys, games, videos. We form relationships even with them, all while knowing deep down that the feelings we have for these objects will not be reciprocated. Nonetheless, these bits of plastic and cloth give us pleasure and security and when we don't have access to them, a part of us is sad.

As we grow and mature, we also realize that we are in relationship with the world and universe around us. We are part of the world. We realize that we don't live, we cannot live without the plants and animals we eat, the trees whose oxygen we breathe, the clouds whose rain nourishes the soil, the grass we walk on and the hills and mountains we hike.

To be human is to be in relationship with all kinds of things, living and non-living. Yet, when any of these things is absent from our lives, we surely notice it and we surely feel something is missing because of their absence.

Yes, friends, to be human is to be enmeshed in an incredible sea of relationships that help us understand who we are and what we are and how we relate to and interact with each other, the earth, and in fact the entire universe!

We are not alone. We cannot be. Our existence is so dependent on the actions and reactions of ourselves and so much else. Now we tend to take most of these relationships for granted. We forget how intimately our lives, our very existence is tied to so much else. Most of the time, we take the water we drink and the air we breathe for granted. They are just there — until they are not. The people of Flint, Michigan trusted that their water was perfectly fine, until it was understood that the

water was literally poisoning and hurting people, especially the children. I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and hardly a day passed when the sky was not clear, but reddish and darkish because of the smoke produced by the steel mills all over our area. The air stank but we were told that that was the smell of money and we should not complain. Oh sure, the air pollution was hurting our bodies as surely as the water pollution was poisoning the children of Flint, Michigan, but was all good, wasn't it? Our disastrous relationships with the air and water were just a small price to be paid in order to enjoy all the other relationships we had in our lives.

But there is another relationship. One I've left out so far. And that is our relationship with God.

Who is God? What is God? To be honest, most of us really don't know. I mean everybody has heard of God. Everybody has thought about God. Some accept the existence of a God, a creator, a first cause. Others do not. Nonetheless, the question of God and whether or not God exists is an essential part of our relationship puzzle.

The only question is, how does God fit in?

Ultimately, every human being has to answer the question, Who is God? And more importantly, how am I to relate to this God? And the answer is, frankly, for many of us, even those of you watching this service, is we just don't know.

And that, that, that, my friends, is what this day called Trinity Sunday is partly about.

Let's face it, when it comes to the question of knowing, understanding, much less explaining God, we tend to be at a loss. Very, very few people are willing, let alone able, to talk about their faith or ideas about God to others, even people to whom we are connected closely and intimately.

And of course the reason is clear, isn't it? How can we explain something, anything, to others that we don't even understand ourselves.

I, for example, would be the last person on earth to explain how a slide ball works in baseball. I have no idea of how to execute a layup in basketball. Don't hand me a video game controller because I have no clue what the buttons do.

So how can, and why should, the church expect members to talk frankly and openly about God and their understanding of God and their relationship with God to others when they don't understand it themselves? How is it logical or reasonable to expect any of us to talk about God to others when we can't talk about God to ourselves? Nonsense!

Yet our relationship with God is a fundamental question that drives our very existence whether you are part of a faith community or not — whether you believe God exists or not. When you think about it, your understanding of God influences everything you do and why you do what you do.

If, for example, you reject the existence of God, then really what drives you or, for that matter, what constrains you? What is your ethical and moral compass, so to speak? The Judeo-Christian God specified certain ideas presented in the scriptures such as don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, care for your parents, do not worship human beings in God's place, just to name a few. In the absence of a God's commending and commanding these actions, what is the foundation on which our decisions and choices are based? I mean why is killing other human beings automatically bad? Why should I not steal and grab as much as I can while I am alive? What is the value of caring for other people, especially those who don't care for me? Why should I not look out for number one, first, last, and always and not care at all for anybody else!

Oh, is that too extreme? Why? Alright, it's good to care about others, at least others I personally know and care about, right? Surely God, if God does exist, does want us to care about other people besides ourselves. On the other hand, if God exists and God gave me a brain, then why should I not use it to enrich myself and, yes, my family and few friends. God gave us life, well, shouldn't we make the most of it? Thank you, God, for my brains and other talent, bye!

If we say we believe in God, but really pay God scant attention, how different is that from those who reject God altogether? Yet, I think that is the dominant attitude across the world. Sure, there is a God. That's nice and all, but so what? Because many assume that God is not understandable, distant and remote, we don't really need to pay attention to God and God's plan for living.

But what if God was not remote and distant? What if God really does know us personally and cares about every one of us? What if we could conceive of our being with God as a relationship — a relationship rooted in love, total love?

Our Christian faith is based on having such a relationship with God — an intimate, personal relationship. As Christians, we do not believe God is far away. God is actually part of us. We are connected, bonded now and forever, to God.

How do we explain this relationship? We call it the Trinity: three ways to understand God and how we related to God.

First, we look at God as the creator. God the creator is the way most human beings of all religions understand God. God is the one who made the world, made us, made the rules by which the world should operate. For most people, perhaps even those in this room, that understanding of God is sufficient. I am here and God is out there and that is just fine.

Of course such a distant relationship demands very little of us or of God. Sure God is around, but so what. Let's do our own thing.

But for Christians, there is another factor and that factor is Jesus. We make the extraordinary claim that Jesus is God. In Jesus, we say that God, the creator God, actually became a human being, walked and talked and taught and healed among us for the express purpose of showing us how God wants us to live. Suddenly God the creator is no longer out there. God the creator is here. God is with us. God is not an abstract idea. God lives and through the life of Jesus restores or redeems our relationship with God. Creator, redeemer. In fact Jesus himself described his relationship with God as being so close, it was like that of a Father and a Son.

Now these issues of gender have raised questions and concerns for centuries. Is God male? Of course not. God is beyond human description. Jesus, God on earth, was male, but could have been female. Given the culture of the times, more people paid attention to a male than a female — as is often the case today, unfortunately. The point of describing God as Father or Jesus as Son is not to focus on their gender, but rather help our human minds grasp the relationship between the God who creates and the God who redeems. They are as close as a parent is to a child, a mother to a daughter. God is not impersonal. God is not a machine. Machines can't love. Machines can't feel. The scriptures are full of the range of emotions both God and Jesus feel in order to help us understand that we are not distant from God. No, we are understood, loved, and accepted.

Yet once again, we can still view God as being apart from us. God the creator is “out there” someplace. Jesus the redeemer, sure he was here, but that was long ago. Where is Jesus today? Again what do have to do with me?

But God has been and continues to be with us in the most intimate relationship of all. God is not only outside of us as the creator. God not only walks with as Jesus our redeemer. God dwells within us, sustaining us every hour, every minute, as the Holy Spirit. God is in us. Relating to us, knowing us, loving us!

Being a Christian is all about being in relationship with God and with each other. The point of the Holy Trinity is to emphasize the community of being which is God, a community which intimately linked to us by the Holy Spirit, living within us. And if God's spirit dwells in you and me, and everyone on this earth, then we, all of us, are in community with each other!

We are one! We are interrelated! We are bound to each other! That, that, that is the point of our faith, to unite us as one body in love, in hope, in justice, in support! No wonder that once the prophet Isaiah encountered God and finally understood the intimate relationship God had with him and has with the whole world, what else could he do but shout out and ask God to send him to share God's love with the world. God in community, three in one!

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.