

**The Sunday Missive – May 26, 2024
Trinity Sunday**



monument to the holy trinity, vienna

Hymn 362 Holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytMt786zd7U>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 6:1-8

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.”

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!"

Psalm 29

Ascribe to the Lord, all you gods* ***Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.***

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due God's Name* ***O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.***

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;the God of glory thunders* ***The Lord is upon the mighty waters.***

The voice of the Lord is powerful* ***It is a voice of splendor.***

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees* ***The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;***

Who makes Lebanon skip like a calf* ***And Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.***

The voice of the Lord splits the flames of fire and shakes the wilderness* ***The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.***

Who makes the oak trees writhe* ***And strips the forests bare.***

And in the temple of the Lord* ***All are crying, "Glory!"***

The Lord sits enthroned above the flood* ***Enthroned as King forevermore.***

The Lord shall give strength to the people* ***And give them the blessing of peace.***

Romans 8:12-17

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will

live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Hymn 718 Vv. 1 & 4 God of our Fathers

God of our fathers, whose almighty hand
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
Our grateful songs before thy throne arise.

Refresh thy people on their toilsome way,
Lead us from night to never-ending day;
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
And glory, laud, and praise be ever thine.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5XGK30Hmoc>

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Come Alive -- Trinity B

Today we celebrate as Trinity Sunday, and, for many of us it involves taking a big risk, story-wise. Our readings help us deal with this by portraying some of the most powerful and imaginative metaphors the human mind has ever conceived: six-winged seraphs, debtors to the flesh, born from above. They have been employed in an effort to describe the power and perfection of God. The Trinity is, at its basic level an example of this too. We follow what is called monotheism, which means one God, but the moment that declaration is out of our mouths, we start talking about God as three-in-one; one-in-three.

I'm reminded of the story of when Jesus saved the woman caught in adultery from the townspeople who were about to stone her. We are sometimes told that Jesus is the only person who has lived without sin. So there he is, with everyone gathered around holding big rocks over their heads about to fling them upon the woman and he says, “Stop! Whoever is without sin, let them cast the first stone.” You all know this story. So, one by one they drop their stones to the ground and slink sheepishly away into the countryside, realizing they all sin too. All of them, that is, except one woman, who stays, with a great big stone over her head, about to bring it down in righteous anger and ruin his object lesson. Jesus looks at her with a pained expression and says, “Aww, come on, Mom!”

This is not to be flippant about the sinlessness of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but to point out that we have trouble defining God. We can't seem to do it directly; we tell stories and think up metaphors that help us communicate with one another about what God means to our lives: God is the spirit of our lives, the source of our being. Like life itself, God is our greatest joy and our greatest fear. God both creates and judges. Life both begins and ends. It's impossible to describe directly; we must allow ourselves to embrace the metaphor.

The scriptures today contain a number of these amazing metaphors. The hem of God's robe fills the entire temple, with angels surrounding God's presence, each one with six wings. God's power to make us new is so miraculous that we can have our mouths touched by a live coal and be, not burned but healed. And if we don't understand what God wants, we will be destroyed, and by the way, fewer than a tenth of us will understand. Pretty tough stuff.

The psalmist is a little more pastoral. Now we're talking about God's voice, and it doesn't kill people, just trees, cracking them and stripping their bark and blowing so hard it makes entire geographical areas skip "like a young calf." For those not experienced with livestock, this may seem ridiculous, but it's not, cattle do indeed skip, it's just a strong metaphor, a special effect, like in a disaster movie, or in reality an earthquake

The voice of God takes on a human personality with Jesus of Nazareth, in whom the metaphor merges with reality. An actual man becomes a divine reality and vice versa. The story becomes a fact, and then turns back into a story, it's a story that we tell each other over and over and which never loses its power: "For God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

According to this story's truth, life and God are no longer by turns fearsome and fascinating, they are both clearly good and joyful. But only, as St. Paul insists, in a spiritual frame of reference. Religious historian Diana Butler Bass describes the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Spirit:

“The Spirit is what empowers Jesus to be present in the world; the same Spirit that has been at work since creation. This driving force, the animating creative life of the entire cosmos, is responsible, in particular, for the vision of those who are most attuned to the heartbeat of God. Peter recognized this as he preached to the Gentiles: “You know ... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed ... for God was with him” (Acts 10:36–38).

Jesus would not exist without the Spirit; he would have been a humble tradesperson and not a continuing living presence if not for the Spirit. Christian theology has typically privileged knowledge about Jesus as the way to know the Spirit, but the Christian life works the opposite way. We cannot know Jesus without the Spirit.”

If we insist on staying literal, we will always remain limited. But if we become spiritual (that is, mystical and open to metaphor), anything and everything is possible. We all know we all die. But if death does not get the final say, then joy can push out our fear and we can become able to love freely; we can be “all in,” as the poker players say in the movies, but without the risk, because we’re working for the house.

One reason it’s hard to be a spiritual person is that although every deep truth about God is best expressed metaphorically, every deep metaphor is not about God. That’s why the first commandment is the first commandment. If you saw even one episode of *Mad Men* on television, you know what I mean. The story takes us back to a time when companies selling products were just discovering how powerful deep metaphors can be in getting people to buy things, whether they can afford them -- financially or nutritionally -- or not. The sixties and seventies were filled with strangely captivating advertisements that had us sentimental and happy and excited without knowing why. Why is because they were bursting with barely concealed iterations of God metaphors.

Take one of the most amazing examples: the selling of sodapop – soft drink is the euphemism -- that most folks in America will not go without. In 1963, we were extolled to “Come alive!” because we were in “The Pepsi Generation.” In other words, we could be part of that

less than ten percent of humanity who survive Isaiah's prophesied death and destruction, part of the new generation, simply by drinking Pepsi! By 1971, the World's most successful beverage company by far was – in song -- claiming the same goals and abilities as God's very self:

I'd like to buy the world a home, and furnish it with love
Grow apple trees and honey bees and snow white turtle doves.
I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony I'd like to
buy the world a Coke and keep it company. That's the real thing.
What the world wants today is the real thing.

That may sound like a gospel, but it's really just chutzpah. And in 1974, we heard a pitch that rivals John's Gospel for paradoxical wonder and theological complexity:

It's the nothing that makes us something; it's what we miss that
hits the mark. It's what left out that leaves us in; it's the light
shining over the dark. Un for all; all for Un. 7up, the Uncola.

That may not have been evil, but it was pretty sneaky. They had to get tricky with words, because fooling around with chemicals was increasingly frowned upon. We all know they took the cocaine out of Coca Cola way back in 1909. What I didn't know, until I started looking things up for today, is that they didn't take the Lithium out of 7up until 1950!

Just as we must pay attention to what we drink and eat, we must pay the closest attention to the stories we hear, to be aware of how they are working on us. And we must mind, ever so carefully the metaphors we ourselves use. Because, as we talked about last week with the thousand tongues, each of us encounters God differently, and the whole Bible is a chronicle of our attempts to convey those encounters with vivid and resonant metaphors. There I go again, vivid is a sight metaphor and resonant is one for hearing. Keep trying, keep exploring, keep telling, keep listening. One woman's God is another man's Dr. Pepper, and nobody ever gets it just right. Life really is much more fun when you're refreshed, but what refreshes you best is not Coke, but faithful compassion.

Hymn 719 America!

O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain;
For purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSqVkuTegxY>

Hymn 365 Come Thou Almighty King

Come, thou almighty King, help us thy Name to sing, help us to praise.
Father whose love unknown all things created own,
Build in our hearts thy throne, Ancient of Days.

Come, thou incarnate Word, by heaven and earth adored;
Our prayer attend: come, and thy people bless;
Come, give thy word success; stablish thy righteousness,
Savior and friend.

Come, holy Comforter, thy sacred witness bear in this glad hour:
Thou, who almighty art, now rule in every heart,
And ne'er from us depart, Spirit of power.

To Thee, great One in Three, the highest praises be, hence evermore;
Thy sovereign majesty may we in glory see, and to eternity
Love and adore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvaTmgVJlqI> or
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYFic88QkYY>

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Emma Lazarus