

Trinity B 2021    Isaiah 6:1-8

I have a friend who dutifully researched and posted on social media for at least a full year what national celebration was assigned to each day on the calendar. National Ice Cream Day, National Student Nurses Day, National Miniature Golf Day...there is a day for just about everything, including several that have to do with animals—Puppy Day, Pet Day, Rescue Dog Day. And we always joke that as far as the animals are concerned, they think every day should be about them. In the same way, it's bizarre that we are assigned a Sunday every year for the Trinity, because the Trinity is really just the language we use to speak about God, and shouldn't every Sunday, and really every day, be about God?

Last week we read the story of Pentecost, where pilgrims who were gathered in Jerusalem heard the disciples testify to God acting through the life of Jesus. They took that story with them back to their homes in all corners of the known world, and those communities began living as followers of Christ. In those first few centuries of the Church, the piety and theology of Christianity developed somewhat differently in those diverse communities that were separated by geography, so when the leaders of those churches came together, they couldn't always agree about what they believed or how they should practice the faith. A few hundred years after Jesus, they started convening councils to debate and decide what scriptures were authoritative and what ideas about God they thought were right. The things they agreed on became doctrines; the things they decided were wrong became heresies. The creeds that were written in the course of those debates are as much a reaction to what they didn't believe about God as what they did believe. You'll notice that each of the creeds speaks of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is how a religion whose bedrock confession was the *shama*—*Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is One*—could talk about Father, Son, and Spirit while still claiming to believe in only one God.

That was your church history lesson. I can tell you where the language of the Trinity originated and how and when the early church decided to make that doctrine official. But I can't really use the Trinity to explain God. All of the clever metaphors we try—the Trinity is like ice, water, and steam; the Trinity is like a woman who is mother, daughter, and sister; the Trinity is like one clover with three leaves or one triangle with three points and three sides—all of those are oversimplifications that put us in the territory of one heresy or another. Perhaps Trinitarian language is most useful for

showing us how impossible it is for us to understand one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—unique yet undivided, separate yet totally united, proceeding one from another yet all eternal. Someone joked this week that preaching about the Trinity is kind of like dancing about algebra—that’s not what it’s for.

So we talk about the Trinity being a mystery, but not in the sense that if we were to read to the last page we would be able to figure it all out. If we want to know what it would be like were we to come face to face with the Divine, we could look to Isaiah’s vision. Isaiah sees the Lord in glory and awesome majesty, enthroned and filling the temple. He sees six-winged seraphs—those are flying, flaming angel-snakes—how cool is that?—and in the presence of God, the seraphim can only worship. They sing, “Holy, holy, holy” —which is not addressing the three persons of the Trinity, it’s the repetition that the Hebrew language uses to emphasize

something: the Lord is not just holy—the Lord is really, really, completely and ultimately holy. And to be holy, to be sacred, means to be other, to be set apart. The Lord is the one, the only one, who is what the Lord is: not to be explained, not to be understood, not to be defined, figured out, tamed or contained within any of the boxes that we wish we could use to wrap our minds around God. The only thing that Isaiah can do in the presence of the Lord is confess his own unworthiness. God is God, and he is not. God is God, and we are not.

And yet, this God who is holy, who made the creation and can shake it to its foundations, as the psalmist says, chose not to remain separate and set apart from their creation and the creatures in it—that is, from us. God—who as Trinity already existed in relationship—also chose to be in relationship with us. We are going to see that choice in action in just a few minutes when, in baptism, God adopts Sammie and Lyndsay into the family of Christ forever. The God who made us and came to save us from ourselves also lives in us and empowers us to participate in the dance that stretches into eternity. We cannot explain God—using the language of Trinity or any other words—any more than we can wrap our finite minds around infinity. But knowing that the God in whose presence we can only cry “holy, holy, holy” is also loving, loving, loving, merciful, merciful, merciful, and faithful, faithful, faithful to us is good news—because we need a God whose love is beyond our understanding.