

The Rev. Ryan Fischer
St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Trinity Sunday
May 30, 2021

Lectionary Year B: John 3:1-17

Some of you may have followed my vacation journey from Indiana to the Desert Southwest on social media, and, once again, I am most thankful for the opportunity to get out and see a sizable portion of this great land of ours. I never cease to be amazed by the beauty of God's creation in places as different as the Superstition Mountains of Arizona and the Great Plains of Kansas. Every place I went along the way had its own unique splendor, and the 4,000-plus mile trek that I made in my trusty F-150 was well worth it.

Incidentally, my journey to and from Arizona followed two well-known routes, at least for a good portion of it. On the way there, I traveled along what used to be U.S. Route 66, and on the way back, I followed the historic Santa Fe Trail. Naturally, my love of music got me thinking of the ways these famous routes made it into American song. Many of a certain age will remember songwriter Bobby Troup's advice to "get your kicks on Route 66," but, in my case, the lyrics that came back to me again and again were these: "Stardust scattered all along the highway, on a rainbow-colored skyway, along the Santa Fe Trail." That, in my opinion, is one of the finest lyrics ever written, from the song entitled "Along the Santa Fe Trail," which was popularized by the Sons of the Pioneers, among others. The trail itself was once an important trade route from Missouri to what is now New Mexico, and in-

cludes, in part, some of the magnificent scenery, colors, and vistas that can be the stuff of great poetic imagery... "on a rainbow-colored skyway, along the Santa Fe Trail."

Part of the fun of a cross-country journey is finding all the ways one can get to and from one's destination. My journey included, as mentioned, significant portions of Route 66 and the Santa Fe Trail. And, when I go to visit my uncle and aunt again, I'll probably switch things up some more (first by allowing four days for the trip instead of three!). But when we think about the many ways we can take to arrive at the same destination, we can also think about our lives of faith. Many of us came into the Episcopal Church from other denominations, for example, and recognize that no single church, branch, or sect of Christianity is the one and only "true" way. If the "destination" is, in this case, eternal communion with God, there is a wide variety of ways of getting there.

Now, let's think about the way things work going the other direction -- from God to us. Realizing that this is Trinity Sunday, it would be most appropriate to consider how the Holy Trinity is a communication from God to God's people, revealed in three Persons and yet still one God.

Yes, there is more than one way in which God comes to us. In the Nicene Creed, we confess that God the Father is the "maker of heaven and earth," and that God the Son is "of one Being with the Father" and that "for our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate," and that the Holy Spirit is "the giver of life." All of

these are distinct ways of God coming to us, and yet are manifestations of the one God who made heaven and earth, who gave us his only Son "so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16b), and who sent his Spirit to be our Advocate and guide after his Son returned to heaven.

We know, too, that, in the Church, God comes to us through the Word and in the Sacraments. We hear God's call through the Word read and proclaimed. We celebrate in Holy Baptism the union of the baptized with Christ in a bond that lasts forever. We receive Christ in Holy Communion as he is present in the bread and wine. As Christians, we speak often of God coming to us in Christ, and, to that, we can add Christ's coming to us in the Sacraments...then it becomes clear that there is a vast array of ways for God to come to us. Think, as well, of the Old Testament, where God used means such as a burning bush, a pillar of cloud and fire, and a covenant in which God came to the Israelites with both assistance and expectations. In today's Gospel, we have this rather odd Old Testament reference to Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness. (For those who remember the story, it was God who commanded Moses to lift up a snake on a pole, so that the Israelites might gaze upon it and live. This actually is related to the use of serpents in medical symbols...obviously with a connection to healing.) Of course, when we hear of the Son of Man being lifted up, this can be identified as a reference to the cross.

And yes, God comes to us in the cross; in fact, it is here in which God's love is most profoundly revealed. The sacrifice of God's only Son to rid the world of sin and redeem us from a broken

relationship and eternal death is the one sacrifice in which Christ accepts the judgment and execution that would've otherwise belonged to us. Look at that which is lifted up -- Christ on the cross, not the serpent -- and have eternal life.

But how do we become, in light of the way God reveals himself to us, more thoroughly trinitarian? It would seem as if all the denominations of Christianity have, perhaps, some undue weight given to their favorite Person of the Trinity. I have heard of mainline Protestants being a tad "heavy" on the second Person (God the Son, Jesus Christ), and likewise for strict Calvinists on the first Person (God the Father), and, as we were reminded last Sunday, our charismatic and Pentecostal sisters and brothers are huge on the third Person (God the Holy Spirit). But aren't these Persons, according to long-held dogma, co-equal and, thus, deserve equal attention in our worship, teaching, and life?

That would be easier said than done, for sure. It might be more helpful for us to return to the idea that God comes to us in more than one way. Yes, God comes to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and God also comes to us in the Word read and proclaimed and in the Sacraments, where God makes us his own and sustains us on the journey. The Trinity is, indeed, active in all the examples given here. God is creating always and everywhere in the new life that constantly springs forth and in the new things that make our lives better. God is redeeming by transforming sinners into his righteous and blessed children through his Son Jesus Christ. God is guiding his people, the Church, into a deeper communion with him and forming them into his saints through his Holy Spirit. And

all of this happens simultaneously and with no order of importance given to any of the Three. Perhaps at this point it may be better to stop explaining and just let the Trinity be...

Letting the Trinity be is a matter of thinking in terms of journeys and destinations. How one gets from Indiana to Arizona and back is not limited to just one or two routes...to Route 66 or the Santa Fe Trail; no, a quick glance at a road atlas or Google Maps will open up a myriad of possibilities. And even when the journey changes and the destination doesn't, what may happen along the way will always offer something new and interesting. I never dreamt I would one day be photographing a tiny Episcopal church in Shamrock, Texas or meeting one of my predecessors in Santa Fe, New Mexico, but it happened, and while the "destination" was to see some familiar people I've known all my life, the journey took me through some unfamiliar and surprising places.

God undoubtedly realizes this. Scripture shows us how God journeys to his people in ways that, perhaps, confuse, baffle, and surprise them, but for us, one of his destinations is us. God desires only to make us his people -- in creating us, redeeming us, and guiding and forming us -- and to take us to that final destination where we live eternally among the saints in light. What we need, then, is the openness to God's call to be taken to some unfamiliar and surprising places. The destination will remain the same, but the ways to get there are virtually infinite. As our church continues forward in its various ministries and outreach activities to the community, the Triune God creates, saves, and

forms us to be a part of them, and comes to you now so that you are created, saved, and formed for them, and eventually for eternal life.

Let's allow our journeys to continue with the call and assistance of the Triune!

Amen.