

Trinity Sunday Year B: 26/27 May 2018  
St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY  
The Rev. Gary Cyr, Rector

**...God so loved the world, that God sent Jesus into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it; to heal it.**

Isaiah 6:1-8  
Romans 8: 12-17  
John 3:1-17  
Psalm 29

*"The covenant isn't just for those who ascribe to certain practices or particular laws. It's for all who desire relationship with God, for God desires relationship with humankind."*

This past Thursday, religious leaders from a variety of denominations gather with Christians to hold a vigil to reclaim the mantel of Jesus from those who have distorted his message. They, as well as I, are dismayed at the abhorrent ways a particular ideology has insinuated itself into the Christian narrative. They wanted to shed light upon Jesus in a way that dispels the darkness which surrounds much of our public discourse particularly as regards the dismantling of our social safety-net, increased militarism, environmental degradation, expansion of income inequality, and the erosion of civic protections for minorities; the list can go on. When so much of social media and news outlets focus on those pastors who espouse a gospel of exclusion and domination, this vigil was a necessary means of redressing what I would call a false gospel. It is a case of Jesus being Christ-jacked by supposed religious figures who fan the flames of discord and social inequality to further their own gospel literalism. They, as many others, remain in the dark just as Nicodemus does. However, even Nicodemus allows the Spirit to touch his heart such that he finds in Jesus the Christ of faith.

Truly, truly, I tell you, God so loved the world, that God sent Jesus into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it; to heal it. That's what Jesus is trying to get across to Nicodemus – who's a purveyor of religious law and practice, who steals away under the cover of night for

fear of discovery, in order to speak with Jesus – a message of love and salvation for all. Nicodemus, being nobody's fool, is simply caught-up in temporal matters where he can't see the light; he can't see the forest for the trees. Nicodemus, so swept-up with religious justification through its laws, fails to fully grasp who Jesus is.

Nicodemus recognizes that Jesus isn't your ordinary teacher, yet he isn't fully convinced of Jesus' claim to fame: being the Son of God. Instead, Nicodemus clings tenaciously to the idea that to participate in God's covenant with God's chosen people, Israel, one must not only be part and parcel of the synagogue life, they must be physically born into the Jewish household as well as bear the mark of inclusion. Jesus, however, replaces this accepted norm with the idea of being adopted into the covenant through water and spirit. A new birth, not of flesh and blood; one of spirit and faith. What a revolutionary idea; one of inclusion, love, and relationship. Now that's a gospel message I can embrace: a relationship of inclusive love.

It's quite simple: through the waters of baptism, we put on Christ and become partakers of God's abundant grace and love. The covenant isn't just for those who ascribe to certain practices or particular laws. It's for all who desire relationship with God, for God desires relationship with humankind. In this light, baptism becomes emblematic of God's desire for relationship, which lies at the very heart of God's nature: love. And when love and relationship are combined we are given a clearer vision into the communal inner life of God as professed in the Trinity.

Some of you have been, as they say, around the block at least once. If so, I am sure you have heard many a preacher try to explain the Trinity. Countless preachers have used methodologies of all kinds to help us understand what the Trinity is. Some of them work. Some of them fall flat. Well, I'm not going to fall into the trap. I don't have to. For me, the bible says it well: God is love.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love...God sent Jesus, the Son, into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we love God but that God loved us...we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has

given us God's Spirit...God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."

Such love is an unblemished desire for the other; for the wellbeing of the other. This is a sacrificial and redemptive love, an interdependent love that is self-giving and egalitarian. This isn't some trite narcissistic love – we have too many examples of that in today's culture – this kind of love fosters the best in one another.

When we profess the Trinity, we affirm that it's of the essence of God to be in relationship. The Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer are one in union with each other such that each desires through love the wholeness and completion of the other. The love for the other is such that it is sacrificial and redemptive. That is how we describe Christian relationship. That's in whose image we are created in.

We are created in this image of self-less love, this strong desire for the wholeness of others. We are not a facsimile of God as Trinity, but a reflection thereof. That's part of the message those who gather in D.C. this past Thursday were seeking to impart, the mantle they were reclaiming from those who have distorted that image of selfless Love. This is what Nicodemus wasn't prepared to fully comprehend much less embrace. Yet, the Spirit didn't rest until, over time, Nicodemus has a change of heart. He too, will come to see Jesus as the Son of God and experience the grace of God's Spirit. As bearers of God's image, we too are called to such a witness, to reflect God's love for one another, to embody this Triune Love of interdependent relationship. On this Trinity Sunday, that is what we are invited reveal, we have only to polish off the mirror of our souls so that we can reflect this inner life of God – one of mutuality and selfless giving.