

Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalm 29

Romans 8:12-17
John 3:1-17

Little Johnny's goldfish died. His friend Andrew suggested that they bury the beloved pet in Johnny's back yard. He had been to funerals and knew what to say. They wrapped the goldfish in a napkin, dug a small hole, and as Johnny placed the fish in the hole, Andrew declared: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and In-the-hole-you-go."

Today is Trinity Sunday. As Christians we believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Great Prayer of Thanks giving that is a part of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper has a Trinitarian formula, where we specifically pray to the Trinitarian God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One could say that every Sunday is a Trinity Sunday for on the first day of the week God the Father began creation, Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the church.

But let's face it, the doctrine of the Trinity is notoriously difficult to understand. It is a human attempt to explain who the Christian church has understood God to be, on the basis of Scripture. The biblical bases for the doctrine are important. They are pointers to what the church has been led to say in confessing that God is one and that this one God is three persons at the same time: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the early centuries of the church, as they were hammering out this doctrine, a number of theological statements were proposed, and many were rejected for not expressing what the church believed. Thus, this doctrine was taken very seriously and a lot of work went into hammering out the church's understanding. God is "one," as opposed to a polytheism that there are three rival gods. Yet God is known to us in three person, the father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. All of them are equally God and who, biblically

and historically, are distinctively at work in the world. God's work in "three persons" is still the work of "one God," since the Godhead cannot be "divided" or "separated." The three are one; the One is three. God is one God in three persons. I want to give credit for this explanation to Donald McKim, a respected Presbyterian theologian. I wanted to make sure I got it right, since it is a difficult doctrine to explain.

How is this possible? It sounds like our God is polytheistic. We have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Sounds like three gods, does it not? People of other religions often think our God is polytheistic. However, Christians are adamant that there is one God, yet in three persons. How this is possible is a mystery. We simply cannot fully understand it. Yet the church affirms the Trinity as our basic belief about God. So, what do we do about the Trinity? It is one thing to not be able to truly understand the doctrine. But the bigger issue is how is this relevant today, especially in our modern age? How is this relevant? If we don't understand it, if it is a mystery, what do we do? Should we even care?

Our passage from the prophet Isaiah perhaps gives us an answer. This passage is Isaiah a vision that Isaiah had that led to him responding to God's call to be a prophet. Isaiah is in God's throne room, perhaps the Temple, for the Temple was seen as God's house, where God lived. The Temple was where heaven and earth came together. Isaiah is overwhelmed in the Temple: the hem of God's robe filled the Temple, seraphs are flying around declaring God's holiness with song, the room shakes, Isaiah is surrounded by smoke, which could have been from the burning sacrifices and incense of the Temple. Being in God's holy presence, Isaiah senses his sinfulness, his unworthiness. Thus he declares, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips."

Woe, lost, unclean, these words bespeak his inadequacy, his sinfulness! Then one of the seraphs takes a hot coal, and touches Isaiah's mouth with it, signifying cleansing Isaiah of his sins. Heat sterilizes. If one uses a needle to remove a splinter from someone's hands, one is advised to light a match and heat the point of the needle to sterilize the needle. This will help prevent introducing any germs, and thus infection. After the seraph touches Isaiah's lips with the hot coal, the seraph declares, "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." This is a declaration that Isaiah's sins are forgiven. Then the passage ends with God asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah responds, "Here am I; send me!" Isaiah responds to God's call.

Note the pattern here. Isaiah is in God's throne room. He is overwhelmed by the glory of God. Being in God's glory, Isaiah senses his sinfulness. He declares his sin. The seraph comes to cleanse him of his sin, and Isaiah responds to God's call. This is the pattern of worship! We come into God's sanctuary, and begin worship by glorifying God. Sensing our sinfulness in comparison to God's glory, we confess our sins, and we hear a forgiveness of sin. We respond to God's call. This is the classic outline of right worship: praise, confession, forgiveness, and commissioning. +This is the pattern of our worship. Worship is how we respond to the awe and wonder, the glory, of the Trinitarian God. The Trinity is a mystery and our response is worship.

I hope that you have at one time or another been in awe of something beautiful. Perhaps it was a scene of God's beautiful creation, some scene of nature. The first time I saw the Grand Canyon, I stood in awe. To witness how far it was to the rim on the

other side, to see how far down the canyon went, to see all the colors of the canyon. I just stood here in awe.

David Needham shares this story:

When I was a boy, our family often went camping in the High Sierras in California. Traveling along the eastern slopes of those 10- to 14-thousand-foot peaks involved several steep grades. ... One mountain grade I will never forget. It had a funny name: the "O" grade. "Why?" I asked my father, "Why is it called that way? Is the next grade after it the 'P' grade?" Mom and Dad simply smiled and said, "Just wait. You'll see." Up and up we would climb on the twisting switchback road through scrub pine and sage. And then -- when it seemed we would never get to the top of the ridge -- we did! Spontaneously I cried out, "Oh!" There in front of us, beyond a diamond-studded lake and framed with quaking aspen, was the jagged, snowy Sierra Crest ... higher, more massive, more beautiful, more alive with color than I had dreamed.

A father and daughter were flying cross-country from New York to Los Angeles.

The little girl kept looking out the window and exclaiming: "Daddy, Daddy, there's a river ... Look, Daddy, there's a city. Daddy, Daddy, look at that hill down there ... and there's a lake." The father was busy reading a book, and kept repeating "uh, huh, uh, huh," until he became a little irritated, then embarrassed by his daughter's excited chatter. Finally he turned to the passengers seated nearby and apologized: "Please forgive my daughter. She still thinks everything is wonderful."