

SERMON: 2018/05/27 (1st Sunday aft. Pentecost - "Trinity," Yr. B - Track 1) - Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; John 3:1-17

[Invite children to the front.]

Our God is a *great, big* God.

Right?

Those are the words we just sang, aren't they?

That our God is a *great, big* God.

And certainly we get some confirmation of that from today's reading from the *Book of Isaiah*.

The prophet, who was also a priest (in the Temple [n.1]), was going about his usual, normal, daily business:

Perhaps he was praying?

Maybe he was dusting?

Or maybe he was enjoying a sneaky, quiet snooze in a dark, incense-filled corner [6:4b]: *mmm!* (That sounds good.)

Then, *suddenly*, angels - properly called "Seraphs" [v.2] - filled the room like a great flock of many birds.

And they were *whizzing* this way, and *darting* that; and in the middle Isaiah glimpsed God Himself.

Well, not all of Him: He was sooo "great" and sooo "big" that actually the only thing that was visible was 'the hem of [H]is robe', [v.1].

That's this: [finger the hem on the surplice.]

This is the only part - the fraction! - that the prophet could see: because the rest of God stretched up and up, 'higher than a skyscraper'; His "chest" and His "head" so far above the earth that they were *beyond* human sight in the upper most reaches of the atmosphere.

Wow(!), it was impressive.

I remember standing at Ground Zero in August 2001, and I had to crane my neck *all* the way back to see the top of the World Trade Centre towers because they were so high; and God was even taller that day when He appeared to Isaiah in Jerusalem.

But do you know what?

God doesn't *actually* have a body.

He doesn't have a face and arms and hands like we do, although the Bible often *seems* to speak about these things: [e.g. Gen. 49:24; Is. 51:5; Hos. 11:3]

And if He showed Himself in this way then, it was to *inspire* His people and to *impress* them.

Elsewhere, God is very clear that He is much, much, *much* more than a physical being like us and our pets, which makes Him hard to picture doesn't it? And that's a little disconcerting.

But legs and mouths and brains get tired; they are *limited*.

But not God.

It is because He *doesn't* have muscles that He *is* so powerful - powerful enough, says the Psalmist, to smash down trees just by speaking [Ps. 29:5], and to "shake" the deserts with earthquakes [v.8].

Physical voices can't do that, can they?

Shouting very loud just hurts our throats!

But He [point up] can, and that's why 'all are crying, "Glory!" [v.9], and that's why we should too: because He is "splendorous" [v.4] and "beautiful" [v.2] and really, really "great."

Let's pray: ...

[Ask children to leave.]

It's hard to picture God, and that fact *is* disconcerting.

And many religions have sought to address that problematic issue by giving their deities forms: wings, hawk-heads, fish-tails, serpent-hair, a lion's claws, the horns of a bull, etcetera.

But the Hebrews - the Israelites - went a *completely* different direction.

Even though, *all* around them, were idols and shrines and altars depicting very *creaturely* "heavenly" beings - beings that were supposed to be able to control the weather, or guarded the dead in a subterranean cavern, or dragged the sun around in a chariot across the sky, the people who began writing *our* Scriptures did the exact opposite.

And even made it illegal to copy those other, more powerful, more technologically-advanced, cultures: we see this in *Exodus*, chapters 20 [v.4-6] and 32 [v.1-6], and Isaiah reminds his peers *again* in his own book in 40, verse 18.

And as you bear that in mind, do so remembering the enormous pressure that was on them to conform - when they were slaves in Egypt and then in Babylon especially.

Imagine how their captors would have laughed at them; mocked them; *criticised* them, for believing that, as Jesus says in John's gospel (in the New Testament), "God. Is. Spirit." [4:24]

Because for the pagan nations that surrounded and dominated Israel, an *invisible* God made no sense - it seemed insubstantial, impractical and just plain *weird*.

And certainly it was a *pretty* unique way to conceive God.

So much so, in fact, that, I suggest to you, it suggests an *un*-earthly origin for such a *theology*.

Understand me: the Old Testament perspective of God was sooo divergent from every other religion in the region, and therefore so *unlikely* to emerge in that context, that the fact it did reveals it to be *uniquely* true; *uniquely* of *divine* genius. - not knowledge acquired from observation of the measurable universe that we experience with our senses, but wisdom given 'from above' - to borrow Jesus' phrase in this morning's gospel reading: [Jn. 3:7].

This is why He says - *twice* [1:18 & 6:46] - elsewhere that no one has *seen* the Father.

Not Moses [see: Ex. 33:23] and not Isaiah, and nobody else except 'the one who is from God' - and that's Him, 'the Son'; which is why His testimony - His *witness* - is priceless, peerless and incomparable.

And it is from Him that we derive the doctrine of "The Trinity."

Now, nowhere does He use the term: it was a short-hand coined by the early Church to label a confusing *but undeniable* "body" of data - of Jesus both explicitly describing Himself as the Creator [Jn. 10:30] and receiving worship from the Apostles as such [Mt. 28:9 / Lk. 24:52], and yet praying - repeatedly - to Him as if they weren't *exactly* coextensive with each another [e.g. Mt. 26:39], and also naming that other as "Father" *a hundred-and-twenty times* (just in *John*) whilst preferring for Himself other proper nouns.

So, the same but different.

And then, *in addition*, introducing a *third* person that He calls the "Advocate" - and we met Him last week (on the Day of Pentecost), and hear about Him again in the discussion with Nicodemus.

But '[d]o not be astonished', [Jn. 3:7].

And don't allow your inability to understand the minutiae of all this to distract you from what matters most; don't miss a majestic forest for fascination with a single tree.

For the full reality of the infinite God must surely transcend our limited faculties: like trying to squash the world's oceans into a teacup.

The proper response is, as I told the kids - to quote the Psalmist - 'crying, "Glory!"'

To marvel and give thanks.

And this is where faith comes in.

To His disciple, Thomas, Christ said, 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' [20:29]

And - obviously - that's us.

So, why "*blessed*"?

And not "disadvantaged," "disgruntled," or "doubtful." [Pause.]

Because notice that He said to Nicodemus that "'no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.'" [3:3]

What's the implication there?

That, one day, there *will* be something *visible* for Christians to enjoy: "a kingdom." And, in it, therefore *a king*. - Heaven, then, is not some abstract, ghostly place "up there," but rather is the very *best* unseen things becoming tangible and permanent along with their source, the Star-maker, *down here*.

To be enjoyed *and comprehended* by resurrected, perfected eyes.

And that's something to look forward to!

Footnotes:

1. See: Barker, Margaret (2003), 'Isaiah', in Dunn, James D. G. & Roberson, John W. (Eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, Grand Rapids, M. I.: W. B. Eerdmans, pp. 489-542, 494.