

## Sermon: 2021/05/30 (TRINITY SUNDAY, Year B) - *Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; & John 3:1-17*\_BTR

### Kids' Talk: The Trinity

[Stem of clover.]

I am one human being.  
I am also one human person: Ben Randall.  
God, on the other hand, is one *divine* being.  
But *three* divine *persons*.  
Huh?  
How can that be?

Well, there's no doubt that this *is* what the Bible reveals to be true about the one who made us and loves us.  
*And yet* it is a *very* hard thing to understand:  
over the years, preachers have tried many, many different ways of explaining it.  
(Centuries ago) Patrick of Ireland, for example, very famously, pointed to a simple clover leaf.  
(One plant with three petals.)  
But that won't do.  
Someone less famous suggested that, no no, the Trinity is like water, which can take the form of a liquid, a gas and ice.  
Or maybe, or maybe, or maybe...*nothing* can *actually* be compared with God.  
He's *sooo*(!) much more interesting and amazing than what we see or experience in the *material* world of the here-and-now.

Let's give thanks: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

### Be Born Again

So last week I was describing for you how the Holy Spirit gives Himself to the Church - to its people; to individuals - in (what looks like) "instalments," 'over and over again, ...for *different* reasons; to fulfil *different* purposes.'<sup>[n.1]</sup>  
And He does this, I said: '...to assist us to go *beyond* human weakness and [beyond] human frailty to achieve distinct *and separate* Kingdom aims.'<sup>[n.2]</sup>  
The point I was making was that the significance of Pentecost lay *not* in the fact

that the Holy Spirit arrived among the Apostles, but, more narrowly, in the specific miracle He performed *that day* - granting them instantaneous foreign languages to spread "the Gospel" (outside of Judea).

And I went *on* to explain that they - The Twelve - were *already* (well) "acquainted" with Him:

that He been at work *in* them and *through* them *long* before His fiery, blustery manifestation on *that* climactic occasion.

And, by way of proof, I reminded you of two other, *earlier* instances of His 'handiwork' - *one*, helping them to become forgiving men in *John* 20, and *two*, empowering them to perform healings and exorcisms in *Luke* 10.

But today's passage takes us (even further) back to the *initial* - you might say, "*essential*" - work of the Holy Spirit in the human person:

which is to enable us to become a Jesus-lover - or, "*Christian*" - in the first place.

We explored this topic recently, of course:

How the human brain is like an old computer, its capability to freely choose between good and evil actually circumscribed, hindered and hampered by "sin;" by our nature as creatures in a fallen world, "red in tooth and claw" - and how it isn't enough to merely hear or be told the many reasons to believe in the Bible's claims and promises, that, (*additionally*) we need help "from above"; from *The Trinity* - specifically, from the *third* Divine person - the Spirit, to move "the cursor" and "click the mouse" of seeking and receiving redemption; to "launch the program" of new life. [n.3]

And this is precisely the theme of our New Testament readings this morning:

[Pause.]

Late one 'night', "under the cover of darkness," a high-ranking, clerical aristocrat called Nicodemus came, sheepily, to see Jesus.

He was "sheepish" because Jesus was already known as a trouble-maker, a "rabble-rouser" to the "authorities" - of whom Nicodemus was solidly a member. Yes, Nicodemus was an upstanding, respectable citizen.

The sort of person described in the newspaper as "a pillar of his community."

And we mustn't forget that in this period - the first century - there was a great deal of religiously-inspired turbulence in Palestine; the atmosphere was "heavy" with unrest and eschatological expectation - there was an electricity "in the air," thick with rumour and protest.

And even though there seemed to be false-messiahs and bandit-prophets under almost every rock, Jesus was already distinguishing Himself from the pretenders by - as Nicodemus concedes - '[the] signs that you do': [Jn. 3:2b].

The term 'signs', of course, was a euphemism.

Nicodemus was, with a restrained manner, complimenting Jesus;

he was admitting that Christ had a credibility that His competitors simply and

completely lacked, but he also couldn't quite bring himself to say out loud what is obvious but also extraordinary:

that, in Jesus - a carpenter's son from the "backwoods" of Galilee - 'the presence of God' - so God Himself - is truly revealed: [Jn. 3:2b].

This is the internal conflict in Nicodemus' soul.

He was torn between "towing the party line" and upholding his (priestly-)class' privilege and wealth as God's self-appointed spokesmen, who were thriving by eliminating and suppressing charismatic challengers like the young Savior; *or* giving it all up - forsaking the other Sadducees - to follow the One who really *is* Heaven's champion and "mouthpiece."

In fact, you might say, pushing even *deeper*, to the "bowels" of it all - down to the most *fundamental* principles, that what Nicodemus was *really* "torn" between was the myopic, self-deceiving life focused on just the material - as if that is all there is, *or*, alternatively, diving more honestly into a new kind of life that also acknowledges the "vertical" dimension of the things 'unseen' too. [see Nicene Creed.]

And so, as such, Nicodemus is an "Everyman."

He is me.

He is you.

The person with some doubts.

The agnostic.

He is the non-believer.

The person with no faith.

Or the person of another "faith" (entirely).

He was faced with the evidence that Jesus really is *the* 'Way, the Truth and the Life' [Jn. 14:6], but was wavering, hesitant and unsure about the commitment to pick up a cross [Mt. 10:38], and walk through 'the narrow gate': [see Mt. 7:13-4]. And what he needs, as we *all* need - to be clear, is the Holy Spirit to *clinch* our conviction. [Tight fist.]

And so, lacking that - lacking the Holy Spirit or at least resisting Him, and so as to avoid making a decision, Nicodemus tries to throw up a hasty, thin "smokescreen" of scepticism:

in response to Jesus' observation that Nicodemus needed to let the Spirit help him give *in* to the evidence; to let the evidence overwhelm and transform him - to be "born again," that is, Nicodemus says, basically -  
"What?!"

No way.

Impossible.

'How can any anyone be born [again] after having grown old? ... How can these things be?'" [Jn. 3:4a,9]

And notice Jesus' response - seeing that Nicodemus was trying to back away, as it

were, from the "precipice" of plunging into becoming a disciple, a person of the 'better Covenant' [Heb. 8:16] - a member of the Church, Jesus won't let him, and He *drags* Nicodemus back to that decision-making place - to face *again*, if only implicitly, the facts:

And He does it with one, brutal, and direct question:

"Are you a teacher of Israel [or aren't you]?" [Jn. 3:10]

(I'm paraphrasing, of course.)

The point Jesus was making was a simple one - as a 'teacher of Israel', Nicodemus *should* have been - and was actually - *very* familiar with the *long* history of the Jews, in which, time and again, the fantastic and the remarkable and the hard to accept *were* real - because there *is* a loving Creator to make them so, who suffers no limitation.

*Anyone* who has been doing the Daily Office this week was reminded of at least *some* of that unique history a few days ago by Moses, who summarised it for an audience in (the Book of) *Deuteronomy* (chapter) four:

He says - and I quote:

'[H]as any [other ""]god[""] ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of *another* nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched [""]arm,[""] and by terrifying displays of power, as the Lord did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? ... [And f]rom Heaven He made you hear His voice to discipline you [at Sinai]. [And o]n earth He showed you His great [pillar of] fire... And...brought you out of [slavery] with His own presence, by His great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession, as it is still today.' [4:34f.]

In other words, then, with exactly these sorts of things in mind, Jesus was asking Nicodemus:

"How can you - Nicodemus - as someone who exists *because* of *what* Moses described - a Jew enjoying life in the very land Moses mentioned - a 'land' that was formerly Canaan, and not living as a subjugated, insignificant people in some foreign country, under the pharaohs or in exile in Babylon; how can you be incredulous about my suggestion to you that God can create a new kind of humanity by the Spirit, not constrained by what, biologically-speaking, we are or what we've done?

With this "background" in sight, your threshold, Nicodemus, implied Jesus, of what *can* happen; of what *is* possible should be much lower than most - sooo(!) low, in fact, that you should *easily* be able to step over it and accept what I'm telling you now about the need to 'be born again'.

So do so.

People of St. Matthews'.

If you're finding yourself in "two minds;" wavering, not altogether convinced...

be 'born again'.

*Embrace* the gift of eternity through the Son's sacrifice.

Don't waste another minute.

Say "Yes!" to Jesus, and everything He taught, and experience what it means to be 'saved through Him.' [Jn. 3:17b]

## Footnotes

1. See: [https://www.saintmatthewschurch.net/uploads/1/3/5/8/135834594/sermon\\_-\\_20210523\\_\\_pentecost\\_year\\_b\\_-\\_acts\\_2v1-21\\_\\_john\\_15v26-2716v4b-15\\_btr.pdf](https://www.saintmatthewschurch.net/uploads/1/3/5/8/135834594/sermon_-_20210523__pentecost_year_b_-_acts_2v1-21__john_15v26-2716v4b-15_btr.pdf), (accessed May 27, 2021).
2. *Supra*.
3. See: [https://www.saintmatthewschurch.net/uploads/1/3/5/8/135834594/sermon\\_-\\_20210509\\_\\_6th\\_sunday\\_of\\_easter\\_year\\_b\\_-\\_acts\\_1v6-11\\_\\_psalm\\_47\\_\\_ephesians\\_1v15-23\\_\\_luke\\_24v44-53\\_btr.pdf](https://www.saintmatthewschurch.net/uploads/1/3/5/8/135834594/sermon_-_20210509__6th_sunday_of_easter_year_b_-_acts_1v6-11__psalm_47__ephesians_1v15-23__luke_24v44-53_btr.pdf), (accessed May 27 2021).