

A sermon preached by The Rev. Robert L. Hart, Trinity Sunday, Year B, June 7, 2009, Isaiah 6: 1-8, Psalm 29, Romans 8: 12-17, John 3: 1-17

+In the Name of God, the Holy and Life-giving Trinity. Amen.

On June 19 the youth of Journey to Adulthood leave on their well-earned pilgrimage to Italy. Ten years ago I led a J2A group on their pilgrimage. We visited New York City. On Sunday the group had a big day planned. Being a pilgrimage, however, meant that the first thing we did was go to church. I walked the group down to St. Luke's in the Village. It was this Sunday, Trinity Sunday, on the church's calendar.

When the sermon rolled around, I had to chuckle. The newly minted parish assistant was the assigned preacher. This is the favorite trick of rectors – assign the freshly ordained “newby” to preach on Trinity Sunday. Every young curate just assumes that if it's called Trinity Sunday, then it must be his or her job to explain the mysteries of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to the congregation. So, while the assistant struggles to plumb the depths of the mathematics of the Godhead, the rector just sits back and smiles.

If we look closely at the scripture readings, they seem more an extension of Pentecost, a closer examination of the work of the Spirit than anything else. Paul tells us we are “led by the Spirit of God” and are therefore “children of God.” And Jesus in the Gospel proclaims to Nicodemus that spiritually we are “born of the Spirit.” The three persons of the Holy Trinity are very much present in these two scripture readings, but the operations of the Holy Spirit are where the emphasis lies.

Then there's the reading from Isaiah. Here the experience of God becomes very vivid and direct. For at the heart of Trinity Sunday we are really speaking of what it is to encounter God – God present to us, the creatures of God.

It was in the year that the King died, that the prophet Isaiah had a vision. Isaiah saw the Lord. Isaiah's eyes looked right into the throne room of heaven. What the prophet saw defies description. The throne of God sits in the heart of the Temple and God's glory fills the Temple like the purple and gold robe of an earthly monarch. Around the throne of God are God's attendants – great, glowing seraphim with six wings. Flying around the throne, covering their faces and bodies the seraphim sing in call and response. Ascribing to God glory and power, they shout, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The earth is full of his glory.”

The vision fills Isaiah as the very gates of the heavenly Temple shake and the clouds of incense rise like thunderstorms bathed in the beauty of sunset. And Isaiah in the presence of this awesome God can only lament his unworthiness, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips...” God's glory at first only reveals the limitations and sins of us poor finite humans.

Then God demonstrates something else about his glory. God sends one of those unimaginably fantastic seraphs with a hot, burning coal straight from the altar of God and touches the lips of the prophet. Suddenly the guilt leaves Isaiah and his sin is blotted out. Isaiah stands in the glory of God reborn. Isaiah has as Jesus said, been “born of the Spirit.” He is what Paul called a child of God.

At this moment God addresses the cleansed and strengthened prophet, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah now has the confidence to reply, “Here am I; send me!”

Every Sunday we enter this temple. This is the place of God's glory. Every Sunday God is present and fills this church with the beauty of holiness. Don't we, like the Seraphim, sing "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, heaven and earth are full of God's glory." We too might wonder if we are worthy. Who are we to stand in the presence of the Eternal One? Yet, Sunday by Sunday our lips are touched with the fiery coal from the altar, the burning touch of God's grace, the body and blood of the living, Risen Christ. God's life fills our life and we are accounted worthy. We are filled with God's Spirit.

One of the early church writers once declared that the glory of God is a human being fully alive. I believe this is what flows from the experience, the vision of God. We are made whole. We are filled and made fully alive. And once we stand in the presence of God aware and awake, God asks of us this one question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Isaiah responded to God's glory and God's mercy with a sense of purpose. "Here am I, send me." God's being is holy. God's doing are the deeds of holiness. To be in God's presence is to become that presence in our relationships, in our everyday world.

We are continually reminded that these are hard times. And they are. I am sure that last Monday, June 1, when GM declared bankruptcy will be etched on the history of this city forever. But dear people, we are here before God. The coals of God's altar have touched our lips. And God has declared us worthy of God's mission. God is calling us and saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go?" We have the strength of the Spirit. We are God's own. We can rise up and declare, "Here am I; send me!"