

High and Lifted Up – May 22, 2016

By Wayne J. Schneider – Osanna in excelsis (Hosanna in the highest)

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Isaiah 6:1-8

Holy Trinity Sunday affords the church the opportunity to catch her breath. We can review what has happened since the beginning of the liturgical calendar year with the birth, through the life, ascension of Jesus. We celebrated last Sunday the gift of the Holy Spirit who carries on Jesus' ministry. And today with the Trinity Sunday's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we sing praises to our God who creates, redeems, sustains and gives purpose to our lives.

Since the scope of the subject of the Holy Trinity is so vast, it may be helpful to focus on specifics in today's lectionary readings. In chapter six of Isaiah we read, "In the year King Uzziah died," the prophet was graced with an overpowering vision of the sacredness and magnificence of God, and with angelic beings continually singing of the holiness of God.

In the reading from St. John we discover the story of Nicodemus. And through his experience find that we too have the opportunity to take God's creative, saving and supporting purposes into our lives.

Isaiah reminds us that God is the God of Initiative, the God of new beginnings, fresh starts for our relationships. As Sylvia read, "In the year King Uzziah died..." Uzziah's reign lasted from 792 to 740 BCE. He was one of the better kings, but his death triggered a crisis because Assyria gained influence after his death. Israel's spiritual leaders and populace permitted themselves to assimilate the religion and culture of Assyria, distancing themselves from God.

It was during this time that Isaiah had his vision of God, a reminder of God's ability to benefit everyone. The Seraphim with their constant praise is an observable prompt of our need to worship and adore our God.

It is interesting to note the prophet's response to God's glory revealed, was a personal confession as well as a confession on behalf of Israel's faith community: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." The astonishment of Isaiah's vision is doubled by what transpires as a result of his confession. His personal disclosure and sorrow for his sin, for being a man of "unclean lips," is placed against the image of God's amazing grace, as an angel places a hot coal from the altar against Isaiah's lips saying, "Look, this coal has touched your lips. Gone is your guilt, your sins wiped out."

New life promised and provided for Isaiah and Israel. The mercy and love of God revealed again. The God of new beginnings always arrives. God as instigator. The prophet gives us the perfect example of how to respond to these Godly gifts: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" God asks and Isaiah responds.

When we compare this ancient Hebrew Scripture with St. John chapter 3, we find some interesting resemblances. Once again, the nation of Israel is controlled by a powerful outside force, the Roman Empire. Again, the religious and cultural mores of Rome have tarnished the Jews. People have begun to distrust one another. The paranoia is pictured by Nicodemus, a Pharisee's, nighttime visit. Nic must have been frightened and baffled. But, in his interaction with Jesus, he uncovers a new way to live with God.

Did you notice that 'Q & A' is a part of both stories? In the middle of the glory of God, in that transcendent vision, Isaiah answers God's question that is a request for a new life with God. And, in their secluded meeting, Nicodemus has every question answered and finds comfort in God's assurance that he can be "born from above." We do not know how Nic acts on Jesus' requests, but at the end of St. John's gospel we see him asking Pilot's permission to bury Jesus.

Isaiah and Nicodemus show us on this Trinity Sunday who God is, and how God relates to us. While God is Holy and transcendent, God is also personal, always present interacting with us, giving our lives purpose and meaning. God is gentle in encouraging us, while at the same time challenging us to begin again and again, knowing God will always be for us.

We are ever and always needy people, and our neediness finds expression in the names we give God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Sustainer, Presence, Friend. We thank God for the daily opportunities to expand and extend our experience of God's grace and love.

We always have the opportunity to transform our relationship with God, to amend our understanding of God's love and grace. When we allow time to wrap our minds and spirits around our experiences with the Trinity, we allow windows of renovation to open, doors of change we can both look and walk through. Can you name personal experiences where the fullness of God has broken-through to you and change has happened for you?

And how may your life change as you answer God's question, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Alleluia. Amen.