

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Trinity Sunday, Year B, May 27, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "On A First Name Basis With God"
Isaiah 6:1-8, Psalm 29, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17

Thank you God, for our creation; thank you Christ, for our salvation; thank you Holy Spirit, for our inspiration.

even though this is Trinity Sunday I am not going to attempt to explain the intricacies of the Holy Trinity, how God can be three-in-one and one-in-three at the same time; you've probably heard preachers get into ingenious realms of metaphor-making over this, but, in my experience, upon close inspection few of those metaphors can begin even to hint at the majesty and mystery of God as Holy Trinity; just look at the examples from our readings today: God on a throne attended by six-winged seraphs, God whose voice causes mountains to skip, and God who like the wind blows without us knowing where it comes from or where it goes; all of these are human images for that-which-cannot-be-truly-described, for God is bigger and more beautiful than our wildest imagining; I suggest we all wait until the kingdom comes and get all of our Holy Trinity questions answered then

but also, throughout the Bible, we find account after account about how this majestic and mysterious God speaks to individuals and interacts personally with them; and we see this happen whether it is God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit initiating these personal interactions; clearly, God is accessible to us through all of the three persons of the Holy Trinity

so today I want to talk about our relationship to God as Trinity; how we talk about God is important; how we talk to God and respond to God is far more important; think of how different it is to call to someone as "hey you" or "lady" or "mister" instead of calling a person by name; also think about how different it is to use a formal name than speaking a first name of a close friend or family member; we don't send up our prayers and our hopes "to whom it may concern"; even addressing God as "God" is to use a generic noun and a theological concept that is used in almost every other religion, but often with so very, very different characteristics associated with that word, 'God;' our God is not a generic god, nor is our God an impersonal force, and so our talking and praying and responding to God needs to be personal

a concept like the Trinity, especially in its usual naming of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can lead us into some problems too; how can there be a “father” with no corresponding “mother”?; certainly where a “son” is involved; does calling God “Father” lead us to mistakenly think that God is male, despite what we know from Genesis (1:27), that God created humankind in God’s image ... male and female God created them”, implying that our creator God embodies both maleness and femaleness, or something completely beyond gender; and the terms ‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ are not personal names, but impersonal descriptions; how might we go about talking about and to God in a way that would lead us into a more personal relationship with each the three persons of the Trinity?

recall our sacraments; in our Baptism service, we use only the candidate’s first name; the same is true for Confirmation; this is because God knows us on a first-name basis; so it just makes sense for us relate to God in return on a first name basis

most Bibles refrain from using the name of God the Father, and substitute instead “LORD,” in all caps; you see that in all but one verse of Psalm 29 today; compare that to how “Lord” appears, not in caps, in the Isaiah reading; there it is just the word for a lord and master; some Bibles do use the personal name of God, Yahweh, instead of LORD; God chose to reveal this personal name to Moses at the burning bush, in order for him to use it, and presumably for others, and us, to use it too; Jews do not speak this name for fear of breaking the commandment of not taking the Lord’s name in vain; but if we use Yahweh in prayer, or in praise, or in sharing our experiences of God with others, that’s not using it in vain, and that can give us a more personal first name connection to our creator God

what about God the Son?; we often refer to Jesus as Christ or Messiah, when we really should say “the Christ” or “the Messiah”; both descriptions mean “the anointed one;” but it does make a difference for us to use “Jesus,” instead; how might we think and pray in a more personal fashion if we were more direct in our naming of our savior God on a first name basis? and likewise in our talking about our faith in Jesus to others?

and what about God the Holy Spirit?; unfortunately, the Bible does not give us any truly personal name for the Holy Spirit, probably because the Holy Spirit seems to operate less like a person than Yahweh or Jesus do; wind, breath, fire, and dove, are the images associated with the Holy Spirit; but especially since the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us at our Baptism, we need to avoid the pitfall of dealing with the Holy Spirit impersonally, too; the Bible does give us the Greek word “Paraclete” (some people think of ‘parakeet,’ as another dove-like bird, to help remember the name); Paraclete means “comforter,” “advocate,” “helper,” “counselor” and you’ve seen it translated that way in different Bible verses and in different translations; so I think the use of Paraclete can help us be in a more personal first name relationship with our spirit God

on this Trinity Sunday I encourage each of us to seek God in the fullness of the Holy Trinity; seek God in a relationship with each of these three persons and personalities through which God has chosen to relate to us over the centuries; use these personal names in your own experiences of talking about God and in talking/praying to God; it is important to keep our relationship with God personal, on a first name basis, and be equally attentive to how God, even through all of God’s majesty and mystery, relates to each of us, and chooses to interact with each of us, personally