

Trinity B Sermon
Isaiah 6:1-8
May 30, 2021

“Showing Up”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of God’s robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of God’s glory.” ⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

⁵And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts!” ⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

~o~

*May the words of my mouth
and the meditations of all our hearts together
be acceptable in your sight, O God,
our rock, our redeemer, and our friend.*

~o~

There was once a minister who liked to preach about money. And, truth be told, he wasn't all that good when he talked about theology. Still, when Trinity Sunday came around, he knew he'd have to say something more spiritual than usual. He began with the notion of a mystery.

“There are three kinds of mystery,” he said. “The first kind of mystery is where you know the answer and I don't. Only you can explain it to me. Then there are mysteries where I know the answer, and you don't. Only I can explain it to you. And the third is something neither of us know. We can't explain it at all.”

“An example of the first kind of mystery,” he continued, “is why you give so little to the collection. Only you can tell me. An example of the second is how I'm going to pay the bills with a collection this small. Only I can explain this to you. And an example of the third kind of mystery is the Holy Trinity. And since neither of us can explain it, today we'll talk about the first kind of mystery.”¹

There is little argument that the Holy Trinity is indeed a mystery of the third kind—neither you nor I can adequately explain it. And yet, here we are on Trinity Sunday, the only Sunday of the church year dedicated to a doctrine. But, the Trinity is also more than a doctrine. It's a very human attempt to describe that which is beyond the scope of our words, our senses, our minds—the Ultimate, the Holy, the Divine. At its core, though, the doctrine of the Trinity is about relationship: the relationship between Creator, Christ, and Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is about relationship and it has, I think, some real-life application for us, not meant only to inform how we think about God, but also how we think about one another. The doctrine of the Trinity “says what our sacred text says at its opening creation [story]: that it is not good for humans—or God for that matter—to be alone; that meaning is created in

¹ Gregory Smith. “The Holy Trinity: No Mystery About it,” [Gregorysmith.blogspot.com](http://gregorysmith.blogspot.com), May 31, 2015, <http://gregorysmith.blogspot.com/2015/05/the-holy-trinity-no-mystery-about-it.html>.

community and through relationships; that we do better as creatures when we join hands rather than raised fists.”²

“In essence, the Trinity [can be understood as a] metaphor about relationships. It is a metaphor that directs us toward each other rather than away, a metaphor that keeps us from retreating into solitude whenever relationships grow difficult.”³ And so, it seems appropriate on this Trinity Sunday we spend a little time talking about relationships.

The truth is, relationships are hard work. One therapist tells of a couple that had been having a hard time and went to couples’ therapy to try to help their marriage survive. Two kids, two jobs, five years of marriage — and they both felt they were not getting what they wanted out of the relationship. He needed his alone time, she wanted constant togetherness; she hated cooking, he said home cooked meals make him feel loved. As they were getting their stuff together to leave a session, the woman stopped and said, “I just want ask you something. This is taking a lot of work. I’m working at it, he’s working at it. Are we always going to have to work this hard?” The simple answer, says the therapist, is “Yes!”⁴

Relationships are hard work. We’re not *just* talking about romantic relationships either. Relationships with friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, fellow church members, even with God, are all hard work. Believe it or not, the strange and ancient text I shared from Isaiah might just hold the key to lifegiving relationships.

In a beautiful and terrifying vision, the prophet sees God seated in the temple. After his lips are cleansed by a live coal, he hears God say:

² David Roberts. “*Wrestling with the Trinity: Truth, Myth or Metaphor?*” Patheos.com, May 28, 2012, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/davidhenson/2012/05/trinity-truth-myth-or-metaphor/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Deborah Cabaniss. “Good Relationships Take Hard Work,” Huffingtonpost.com, March 3, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/deborah-l-cabaniss-md/good-relationships-take-hard-work_b_9358456.html

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And the prophet responds: “Here am I; send me!” “Here am I,” he says, and that’s the key. For lifegiving relationships, we’ve got to show up. We’ve got to be present.

Woody Allen once said that “showing up is 80% of success.” Buddhist monk and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh once wrote that, “When you love someone, the best thing you can offer is your presence. How can you love if you are not there?” For our relationships to be lifegiving—for us and for others—we’ve got to be present. We’ve got to show up.

Firstly, we’ve got to show up physically. It’s interesting to be thinking about showing up physically for our relationships in what we hope is the tail end of a pandemic that has insulated and isolated us from many of our primary relationships for the better part of 18 months and still has repercussions for how we gather. Even so, physical presence is a vital part of lifegiving relationships—an element many of our relationships have lacked in the recent past. Whether it’s date night with our partner, family meal time, study time with a child, helping a neighbor with lawn work, sitting with a grieving friend, worshipping together in community, or spending quiet time alone with God, showing up for others in a physical way is an integral component of lifegiving relationships.

Secondly, we’ve got to show up emotionally. Being emotionally present looks like connecting with and expressing our own emotions—being vulnerable with others and articulating what we feel, when we feel it. And it also means making space for others to be emotionally present with us.

Thirdly, we’ve got to show up mentally. Have you ever conversed with a friend, child, or partner only to have them call you out on the fact that you weren’t really listening at all? Focus is the key to being mentally present to our relationships. Lifegiving relationships, relationships that work, don’t lend themselves well to multi-tasking. Put down the phone.

Turn off the TV. Close the computer. We've got to be mentally present to a relationship for it to work.

And so today, on this Trinity Sunday, think for a moment about your relationships with others and with God. What's working? What needs attention? Are you showing up—being present—to your relationships? I invite you to try and identify at least one thing that you're going to do this week to be more present to a relationship. It can be as simple as carving out intentional time for an undistracted phone conversation with an old friend. Or eating dinner with your partner at the table and having a conversation instead of eating in the living room with the TV on. Or sitting meditatively in the backyard or, with this cold snap, by the fireplace and making time for the spirit to interrupt our busy lives.

As we go through our week, may we be guided in our relationships by the image of Holy Trinity—Creator, Christ, and Spirit. May we be present in our relationships—physically, emotionally, and mentally. May we, with the prophet look in the faces of friends, family, neighbors, partners, fellow church-goers, and God and say honestly, "Here am I." Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy One, Creator, Christ, and Spirit,

We offer our prayers to you now:

For the people we love who are suffering;

For the heroes who press for change in institutions that exclude;

For the strangers rebuilding lives after disaster;

For a world torn by conflict, where attacks happen for no reason
and terrible reasons;

For the strength to love and act on that love.

Holy One, Creator, Christ, and Spirit,

Sometimes we see you most clearly in the wonders of what you have created. Sometimes we experience you most profoundly in the assurance of your forgiveness. Sometimes we hear you most audibly in the whispers inspiring and provoking us to deeper understanding and lived experience.

May we serve with the gifts you have given us;

May we love with the kind of love you show us;

May we forgive with generous hearts as you have forgiven us.

We thank you for all the ways you make yourself known to us:

In the beauty of this Spring morning;

In your comfort when fear and worry threaten to overcome us;

In the life of Jesus, who taught us to pray saying: *Our Creator...*

BENEDICTION

And now, may the love of God, the friendship of Jesus, and the peace of God's spirit bless and keep you this day and always. Amen.