

Isaiah 6:1-8 ~ John 3:1-17  
*For God So Loved the World*  
Trinity Sunday ~ Memorial Day Weekend ~ May 26, 2024  
The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

*Sermon:*

What do you love about the summer? This Memorial Day weekend is the official beginning of the summer season. I loved seeing so many houses with extra cars parked, grills fired up, kids playing in the yard, people lined up to get gas for their boats. When you think about your June, July, and August: what does this summer hold for you? What sights and sounds, tastes, and sensations do you hope to enjoy? Jumping into a lake, grilling burgers and brats, the crack of a baseball bat sending the ball for a home run. Watching your garden grow. Okay: weeding, well not so much. What about eating your first juicy ear of corn on the cob picked that very day, drenched with butter and a shake of salt!

What comes to mind for you? Turn to someone worshipping near you and tell them what you're thinking of. I will give you 30 seconds and then I will ask the person who was talking to stop, so the listener can become the talker. First, I will repeat the question: what do you love about summer, or are looking forward to especially about this summer. Find your person.... GO!

Of course, Memorial Day weekend is not *just* the beginning of summer. Tomorrow is the day we set aside to honor our fallen heroes and remember the sacrifices made by our Veterans and service members in defending our freedom and protecting our nation. In today's worship service, through music and prayer, pathways will be opened for us to give thanks for their service and sacrifice from the Revolutionary War to today. And to ponder how we are being called by God to take actions that will help move our country closer to the dream for which they gave their lives: A land, a nation where there really is liberty and justice for all. For all people and all creation.

You may be wondering how the delights of summer and the sacrifices of our nation's Veterans connect with holy Trinity Sunday. Or you may be wondering how summer and Memorial Day connect with Isaiah's call in the year that King Uzziah died over 700 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Or how summer and Memorial Day connect with the snappy, somewhat snarky, yet revelatory nighttime conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Or you might be wondering what's for lunch and how long is she really going to keep us here on this holiday (and high school graduation) weekend? Whatever you are wondering right now, stay with me and hopefully you will come to see the connections God has for you today.

I pray that you will come to feel and experience Trinity. That is our relationship with the Holy One who is Relationship. Here's the thing: Unless the gift of Trinity is practical and felt, it is no gift at all. We use this churchy word, Trinity, as shorthand for describing a grounded reconnection with God, self, others, and the world. Contrary to what most of us think: Trinity is not a belief. It is a way of describing our inner experience of transcendence, what some have called, "flow." For we Christ followers it's shorthand for God as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. But how and when does a real, direct, heart-felt relationship with God take hold for each of us?

What happened to Isaiah in the temple that day and what happened to Nicodemus that night, could both be called "pivot points" in their lives. A moment of truth, of awakening: An experience that would change them forever. Each of these "pivot point" stories teaches us something about how God speaks to us. Connects with us. Teaches and transforms us. Takes hold not as much in our minds, as in our guts.

First, let's consider Isaiah's call. Unlike other prophets, like Jeremiah, whose call story launches his call as a prophet in Jeremiah 1, Isaiah's call from God occurs while he is already on the job, here in chapter 6. He was likely just popping into the Temple that morning for a quick morning prayer before getting work, and kaboom! God smacked with that awesome, crazy intense vision where God was so big the hem of his robe was bigger than the temple, surrounded by fluttering six-winged seraphs, who are, btw, the highest order of celestial angels, fluttering about, taking a live coal to Isaiah's mouth. Yikes! Maybe that's why Isaiah raises his hand immediately, no hesitation, "Here am I! Send me!!" For Isaiah, his "pivot point" was full of light, sound, and fire. God said "go!" And he said "yes, Here am I, I'm on it!"

Not for Nicodemus. His pivot point was darker, quieter, slower. Surely that night he didn't see it. Looking back, we can see it actually began with his burning curiosity to sneak out and talk directly to this Rabbi who had turned water into wine. And who caused a ruckus in the Temple driving out the money changers with a wild claim that he could raise up the Temple after its destruction in three days. Who is he to make such a claim? Nicodemus *had* to find out. Figure it out. Did you notice how Nicodemus literally disappears from this scene? The last words that Nicodemus utters in today's story are, "How can these things be?"

At that point he could not line up what he had felt and seen: the signs and wonders that Jesus had done. With what he knew in his head: the Torah and the prophets. God's laws that lead to righteousness and justice. And then along comes this Rabbi talking about being born of water and from above, of the Spirit. He could feel the power and the light of this Rabbi called Jesus. He was trying to understand Jesus with his head. But he just couldn't get what he was saying about being reborn in the spirit. Or the connection between Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, like the Son of Man being lifted up. It didn't make sense. Not yet.

For Nicodemus, it took time. And unlike others who came to Jesus with big questions and we never hear what happened to them after their Jesus pivot point, we do have record of Nicodemus' slow, yet huge turn toward Jesus. In John 7:50-51, Nicodemus comes forward to defend Jesus' right to a hearing, and finally in John 19, Nicodemus gave one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloe and to help Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus' dead body. (John 19:38-40) Yes, in time, Nicodemus came around to seeing and believing what Jesus first told him that night.

Perhaps you are more familiar with these more contemporary pivot points: Two droids show up at Luke Skywalker's farm on Tatooine. Plucked from the fire, a ring reveals strange words long hidden. A giant tells a young boy, "Yer a wizard, Harry." .... On the day of her coronation a new queen Elsa of Arendelle can no longer conceal her magical powers, and

discovers she no longer wants to. How long does it take for Mirabel to discover she too, has a gift. In fact her ability to bring people together saves her village, Encanto.<sup>i</sup>

These pivot point moments, from some of our favorite stories, as well as in our own very real lives are what can be called: *kairotic* events. Moments, or a sequence of experiences in which the will of God can be more clearly seen, and the presence of God more keenly felt. The times we can see and feel that God is on the move in the world, and we are called to be a part of it. Often, they are subtle, unremarkable at the time. I was amazed and inspired by the “pivot point” moments that were shared by our new elders and deacons last Thursday night during their training. Truly God moves in mysterious ways. No two of us have the same story in our life with God. We have changed the way we do confirmation class to reflect this understanding of God’s relationship with us. Instead of having all the students profess their faith on an appointed day and time at the end of the class, like a graduation ceremony, as each one comes to that point in their faith journey, we acknowledge that *kairotic* moment and passage with them according to their discernment.

At the same time, God is consistently and forever with us, infusing all creation with holiness for those who have learned how to see. In every vital impulse, every force toward the future, every creative momentum and loving surge, every dash toward beauty, in the budding of a plant, the loving nuzzling of horses, the downward flow of every stream. You get the idea. That’s where the joy of summer shimmers with the glory our Triune God. Yes, our God who loved and loves us so much, that he became one of us in Christ Jesus and chose the ultimate sacrifice to die for us. Here’s our connection with Memorial Day: the way of Christ is the way of sacrificial love to save the world. What sacrifices are we being called to make in order to bring the world in line with God’s dream?

Big question. We discern these actions from deep interaction with God. Perhaps you are longing to deepen your own inner experience of the One Life moving in and through you. As Richard Rohr suggests in the appendix of his book, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Transformation*, “The future of mature Christianity will be practice-based more than merely belief-based”<sup>iii</sup> I have selected one of the practices he suggests to try right now together, to end this sermon together. And *do* try this at home. Or wherever, *whenever* you need to experience greater oneness with our Triune God, the One Life moving in you. Are you ready?

It’s the *YHWH* (Yahweh) Prayer. The name that was given to Moses, translated as “I Am Who I Am.” The word was literally unspeakable and unpronounceable by any fervent Jewish believer, as it is for many to this day. It was also unspeakable because it was meant to imitate and replicate the sound of human breathing in and out. Try it now!

- First inhale. (Say *Yah* breathing inward; to do this correctly you must keep the mouth cavity completely open, not using tongue or lips.)
- And then exhale. (Say *weh* breathing outward and again keep the channel completely open, not using the lips but letting the breath glide over your tongue.)

Here's the thing: we can never say "God" and really know what we are talking about, but we can *breathe* God. If you think about it, this means the first word you ever spoke when you came out of your mother's body and were born into this world, was the sacred Name. Your naked existence gives glory to God by the one thing it has done constantly since birth, which is to take in and give back the breath of life in equal portions—or you will suffocate. (Isn't that a life lesson right there!) We all know there will be a last breath for each of us someday, and it too will be the sacred Name.

When you start to panic, or get scared, or feel completely alone. Breath the YHWH prayer. Whenever you feel the need for greater awareness, joy, and divine presence in your life, stop and hear this Name in your breathing, using the YHWH Prayer. Father Richard Rohr suggests setting a timer and trying it for 10 minutes. Don't worry, right now, let's try it for 20 seconds. Let the rhythm of your own breath guide your pace. Ready, set go....[20 seconds of YHWH breath prayer]... Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Robert A. Ratcliffe, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 3*, Editors Green, Long, Powery, Rigby, Sharp, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 2021), p. 5.

<sup>ii</sup> Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*, (Whitaker House: New Kensington, PA, 2016) pp. 204-206. This final piece of my sermon is taken directly from these pages.