

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

May 30, 2021

Pentecost +1 / Trinity Sunday, Year B

The readings this week:

- Isaiah 6:1-8 ◦ Psalm 29
- Romans 8:12-17 ◦ John 3:1-17



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## How Can These Things NOT Be?

*Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"*  
~ John 3:9

Nicodemus' question sounds logical enough, doesn't it? After all, inquiring minds want to know. Now that we've had the celebration, joy, and excitement of Pentecost, we come to that lovely Sunday where the temptation is often to rehash and attempt to explain the truly inexplicable nature of God and the concept of the Trinity: One God in three persons. One God in three essences. One God in three expressions. Good luck with that!



And frankly, would you rather hear or preach a sermon about how to chip away at the notion of a mysterious, creative, powerful triune God and attempt to try to prove the

improvable, or would you rather share the story of a Creator who so desires a relationship with humankind that God would give up the Son—God's own self—so that we can avoid condemnation and have real, lasting, eternal life? Instead of trying to compare the triune God to any earthly thing, why not explore the relational God who is always doing a new thing in, among, and through us? This is the God who blots out our sin, wraps us in love, and wants to be deeply involved in our lives.

I would much rather share this story and not have all of the answers, have none of the control, yet have all of the promise, the amazing love, and the enduring relationship that's found through Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and because of the amazing Creator. Rather than trying to sneak up in the dark and figure things out, to then leave scratching my head and asking "How can these things be?" I'd rather holler to the high heavens "How can these things NOT be?!" and live in the bliss of my ignorance by the mighty gift of faith. Even on those days when my faith seems like a thin, fragile, fraying cord, I'll still stake my claim on it rather than on trying to figure out how God is like a shamrock, or water/ice/steam.

This is the only way I can make sense of a confusing world. The idea of this mighty love of God—a love that destroyed death, that spoke everything into being, and that desires to have a real and meaningful relationship—this trumps reason every single time. What a lavish gift! What a mysterious gift! What a radical gift!

Our world needs to know that there is something more, that the church is a place where relationships can be forged deeply, where we can come and find—like the theme song from the television sitcom "Cheers"—a place where everyone knows your name. Most of all, our shattered, scattered, and suspicious world needs to see a table where all are welcome and where a relational God meets us just as we are and equips us to be so much more through the work of the Spirit and in the name of Christ.

God is bigger, more complex, supremely powerful, and way beyond the limits of my simple human understanding, and that is just fine, thank you very much. On this day when we recognize the Holy Trinity and the relational power of God, I find that what I have is enough. In fact, it is much more than enough that the table is spread, the wine is poured, the bread is broken and all of God in divine fullness is present. How can this NOT be enough? How can these things NOT be? With God all things are possible. Go and tell this simply marvelous and ridiculously fantastic story.

~ Sharron R. Blezard, [Stewardship of Life](#)



# Reflecting on the Word



## \_\_\_ 1st Reading: [Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

When is the last time you felt God clearly calling you to do something? What was that experience like? King Uzziah reigned in Judah for 52 years. At the beginning of his reign he followed God closely, but by the end his actions were so sinful that he was stricken with leprosy and lived as an exile from his people. After the death of such a king, what do you think was the political and spiritual atmosphere of the nation? Where was Isaiah when he had this experience, and what does this tell us about him? Try to picture Isaiah's experience. What did he see, feel and hear? Why was it such a powerful experience for him? What was the significance of "unclean lips"? Why might the cleansing of Isaiah's lips signify a deeper atonement? Isaiah put himself in a position to hear from God – how do you open yourself to God's voice? [Faith Element](#)

## \_\_\_ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 29](#)

Looking at verses 1-2, why would a human directly call upon "heavenly beings" (or "angels")? What is it that the writer of this psalm wants the "heavenly beings" to do? In verses 3-9, first make a list of what the voice of God does and, second, try adding a few of your own vivid contemporary descriptions. Lebanon is considered the mountainous region north of Israel. Sirion is a reference to Mount Hermon in Lebanon & Syria, whose waters flow into the Sea of Galilee. With this in mind, consider both the humorous imagination of verse 6 and its powerful meaning. How do the descriptions about God's voice relate to verses 10-11? In what areas of life do you (or the people you know) need to hear of the truths of verses 10-11? Of all of God's works of creation and providence, what are the most impressive to you? How do you praise God for these things? [Ken Castor, Generations](#)

Like human beings thinking about the Trinity, it's the best we can do, I think, for now. But the getting there is such fun! The greatest minds of Christendom have applied reason, philosophical rigor, depth and breadth to understanding and interpreting the church's experience of "Father" "Son" and "Holy Spirit". But in the end, knowing God is as illusive as predicting a firefly's trajectory over a field of hay after dusk, as futile as keeping track of a drop of rain fallen into the ocean in a storm, as blinding as gazing directly at the sun. But contemplating Trinity offers lessons in the dynamism of creation, incarnation, delight, genesis, the inter-relationship of being, of nothing, of everything, of darkness, of light. Image. Silence. And, again, nothing.

~ an excerpt by Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

## \_\_\_ 3rd Reading: [Romans 8:12-17](#)

If you were to be asked "What makes you a Christian?," how would you respond? Which term for God are you most comfortable with: King, Lord, Creator, Father or another term? Why? What would it be like if God was only King and not Father? What about if he was only Father and not King? What makes us "sons of God"? What does it mean to be led by the Spirit? The Spirit of Adoption gives us access to God. Romans 8:15 pictures this as being able to cry out "Abba Father," similar to saying "papa" or "daddy." How can followers of Jesus benefit practically from being able to have access to God? How does this passage speak to assurance of God's love and salvation? Why is assurance during times of uncertainty so valuable to God's people? [West Hills Community Church](#)

## \_\_\_ 4th Reading: [John 3:1-17](#)

What is a Pharisee? Why do you think Nicodemus came to Jesus at night? Why did Jesus brush off Nicodemus's complement and respond as He did? If someone were to ask you what it means to be "born again," what would you say? Given his religious credentials, how do you think Nicodemus felt when Jesus said he wasn't able to enter the kingdom of God based on his deeds? Nicodemus understands Jesus' words only at a surface level. What point is John making by recording this misunderstanding? What does Jesus mean in verse 8 by the analogy about the wind and the Spirit? Why did God make a way for us to receive eternal life and not perish? What must we do to receive it? How are we all like Nicodemus? Have you experienced the new birth Jesus is talking about? In your own words how would you summarize the gospel message? [Cru](#)

## Praying Toward Sunday

Holy Trinity, Mystery of Love,  
Holy Community, Heavenly Family,  
I open my heart to your presence,  
making your home with me.  
I sit among you, sibling,  
gathered at our table,  
fourth member of the Trinity.  
I open my heart to your peace,  
settled about me like a home.  
I open my heart to your whole family,  
all of us beloved,  
all of us siblings,  
all of us enfolded  
in your loving, peaceful presence.  
All of us holy.  
Amen

~ Steve Garnaas-Holmes, [Unfolding Light](#)