

Sermon for 5-26-24

Text: John 3:1-17

Holy Trinity Sunday

Let us pray: Holy God, 3 in 1, expand our imaginations so that we take you out of the boxes we create for you. Remind us you are unbearably Holy yet also incredibly accessible. Amen.

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday. It's an impossible concept, something we use to try to understand God, but its mystery is beyond our comprehension. We understand God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but what does this really mean? The Trinity can feel like an archaic doctrine with no relevance to the here and now.

Many years ago, I had the joy of listening to church musician named John Bell speak at a conference. He's from Scotland, so has this wonderful lilting accent. John told a story about the butcher in his little village in Scotland.

Ask for same thing when he would go in every couple of weeks

They had the same exchange each time for many years

After his father died, he visited this butcher for a regular visit, and when he got home his mother said, **“You know, I can remember the butcher’s face better than I can remember your father’s.” This disturbed her.**

So John and his mother pondered this for a while. Finally they realized why it was so hard to remember his father and why it was easy to remember the butcher.

It was because they knew the butcher in one setting only. They knew his father in many, many different settings. They had memories of him sleeping in his chair and waking up, claiming he wasn't sleeping. They had memories of his at all times in his life, when he was young and when he was old. These memories didn't give them one clear picture, but they did give them a rich store of memories and experiences.

John Bell told this story to illustrate that we can't only rely on only one image of God—that is too limiting for us. Our worship needs to embrace many images of God—and we need different images of God throughout our lives depending on our circumstances and experiences.

The Trinity gives us this. If we only knew God as an unapproachable Holy Being, like the God we hear about in our Isaiah reading for today, this won't work for every situation. Sometimes we need God to be Holy and unapproachable. Sometimes we need to remember that God is all-powerful and will judge. But not all the time.

John also told a story of a retreat he led when we used the image of God as midwife in a worship. After the worship service, he found a woman crying in the hallway. He asked her about her tears, and she told him she had experienced abuse as a child. She had been to years of therapy and done a lot of processing, but she hadn't realized she still struggled to identify with God until that worship service. She said, **“Hearing God as a midwife was the first time I could imagine letting God embrace me.”**

In our text from Romans, we hear that we are inheritors of God, co-heirs with Christ. We are children of God who receive all of God's love even though we don't deserve it. Yet for some it is hard to think of God as a parent. That's why we are given other ways to think of God—such as a spirit surrounding us.

Sometimes we need God to be a conquering God full of righteous anger. Yet it's also good to know a loving God, who John says so loved the world that He gave his only Son not to condemn the world, but so all may have life through him.

This does not mean we can make up our own images of God or turn God into what we want. We still need to be informed by Scripture and community. Yet different images of God help us to embrace God more fully according to where we are in life.

My prayer for you as you encounter change: May you know a Holy God who holds you accountable when you need it. May you know a God who loves you unconditionally when you are feeling alone and scared. May you know a God who surrounds you and moves you in the right direction when you need inspiration. And may you see that God is not only present here, but will be there wherever you go. Amen!