

Trinity Sunday, May 27, 2018:

Today is Trinity Sunday – one of the seven Principal Feasts in our Church Year, the ONLY Feast in our liturgical calendar that celebrates a theological doctrine, i.e., the Doctrine of our Triune God - One God in 3 Persons. So often, this simply becomes a mathematical conundrum – how can 3 be 1? But at the heart of the Trinity is that our God is complete community – a community of 3 distinct persons yet so unified in loving intimacy to be one Divine Being. And this God is the heart and soul of our universe. This is where we came from and this is what we were made for. Whether we realize it or not - deep in our souls is a hunger for reunion with this God who created us. And throughout our lives, this desire pulls us onward to look for God – for love and beauty and justice. Ultimately, we were made for love....

How many of you watched the Royal Wedding? “Love” was the theme of Bp Curry’s sermon - a love that brings together people across differences, a love that points to the God who is the source of love, a love that can change the world.

I must confess...I’ve never been that particularly interested in all the fanfare around the royal family. But for some reason, this time I got pulled in...Watching the wedding...a beautiful bride marrying a handsome prince, the beauty and grandeur...it all just seemed like a fairy tale had come to life.

N.T. Wright, NT theologian and former Bishop of Durham, in his book, “Simply Christian,” focuses in on certain aspirations and desires in all of us – aspirations for justice, for beauty, and for love. All of us long for justice in the midst of a broken world full of corruption and oppression. All of us have this deep seated longing for beauty – that gets tapped when we have those breathtaking experiences of staring at a beautiful sunset or listen to a piece of music that brings us to tears. And all of us long for love – to love and be loved in return. And yet, in every case... the pursuit of this is often illusive and disappointed. NT Wright believes, and I agree with him here, that these are transcendent voices from God that are intended to draw us to God, Himself. It’s like that feeling you get when you hear our choir sing an amazing choir anthem that feels like it is drawing us into heaven. Or when you find yourself experiencing such overwhelming love that it feels like your heart is going to burst. It’s beyond explanation. But the thing about all of these experiences is that they don’t last.... Well, these experiences... they are... claims Wright... God’s voice calling you deeper... pulling you in to the author and Creator of Love and Beauty and the source of True Justice...

And isn't that what Bp Curry said about true love? The true love that was being witnessed in the marriage of Prince Harry and Megan Markle, as is the case of any marriage, is meant to be a pointer to the source of true love, to God, Himself. It's meant to pull our focus past the couple up to God, Himself.

Have you recognized the voice of God in your life pulling you in to His loving embrace? Have you listened to those yearnings and experiences and realized who it is that is calling you?

In our gospel reading today, we have the story of Nicodemus coming up to Jesus to find out more about this interesting new rabbi that was preaching about the Kingdom of God. There was something about Jesus that drew Nicodemus in. He says, *"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."* Apparently, Nicodemus has seen Jesus do some amazing things – to heal people, to release people from suffering, to lift people up out of despair and misery - and he recognizes in all of this that this must be coming from God. God is reaching out to him in all of this and he feels it... he sees it... and so he sets out to try figure out what is going on.

And Jesus responds to Nicodemus and they proceed to have a somewhat confusing conversation about being born from above or being born again. Part of the confusion is that in NT Greek, the word for being "born again" and being "born from above" is the same word. And so you can see the discrepancy. Jesus is talking about being born from above: *"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."* But Nicodemus understands Jesus to mean that one must be born again: *Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"* In the end, it's about both – in order to see the kingdom of God, one must be born *again* - into a new life - but that being born again is also about being born from *above* when the Spirit comes to bring this new life. It's both – being born again and born from above.

Now, just like Nicodemus, we are left to wonder... what does that even mean? Obviously we are not talking about being born again in a literal, physical way – as Nicodemus so aptly puts it: *"How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"* No, it's not about a physical rebirth. It's about a spiritual rebirth, being born from above, being born of the Spirit. But what does that really mean?

The truth is that God is calling all of us – dropping hints and tapping into our souls – through beauty, through love, through our deep desires to see justice enacted in the midst of oppression and corruption. He's dropping hints all around us in the circumstances of life, the inward yearnings of the soul, when hardships hit and we long for relief and peace. I think even the Royal Wedding was a hint from God that pointed beyond itself to the love, intimacy, and grandeur that we have been created for – a love, intimacy, and grandeur that can ultimately only be experienced in the loving embrace of

our Triune God. That's why, I think, for many of us, the Royal Wedding tapped into something deep within our souls. God was calling.

But in order to actually truly and fully encounter the living God, our lives need to be remade, reborn, transformed by the Spirit of God. We are not yet fit for the kingdom. We are not capable of entering into the glory and grandeur of God's embrace. We are a confusing mix of both good and bad, of both purity and corruption. While there is the image of God in all of us, it has been marred and disfigured by the consequences of sin. Part of the fallen condition of humanity is that if left to ourselves, we are adrift and lost in the midst of the sin and darkness brought on by humanity's propensity to disregard God. And in the end, Death will swallow us up for good, unless... God reaches in to make our rebirth possible.

And that is why, the Gospel text goes to say, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

Jesus, God's only Son, was sent into the world not to condemn the world but sent to lovingly and sacrificially love the world all the way through the cross. To give up his life in order, that, for all who believe in Him, we might be freed from the consequences and bondage of our sinful condition and raised us up to new life with Him in His resurrection. We've all heard something to this effect before: Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

But notice, according to Jesus in this passage, it is the Spirit that is the primary agent to make all of this happen. But the Spirit is a mysterious figure... Jesus says, *"Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."* You get the idea that the movement of the Spirit is hard to pin down... You aren't exactly sure of the Spirit's movements – where it's coming from, where it's going – but you know the movement of the Spirit by listening... you hear the sound of it.

Did you get pulled into the magic, wonder, and grandeur of the royal wedding? Might that be the very Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, tapping on your shoulder? Have you been lifted to the heights by the choir or listening to a beautiful piece of music? Did you realize that the Holy Spirit was at work lifting your heart towards God? Or have you had your breath taken away staring out in a sunset or out on a mountain range... did you recognize that it was the Holy Spirit filling your heart with wonder?

In the creation account in Gen 1, vs 2 says "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind/Spirit of God^(b) swept over the face of the waters." At creation, the Spirit of God swept over creation to create it all. Today, the Spirit of God is sweeping through our world to *re*-create it – to call humanity back to God, to find new life in Christ and be reborn by this same Spirit.

Do you hear the Spirit of God blowing through the world today?

Our TRIUNE God is constantly reaching out for us – God the Father orchestrating His plan, God the Son making God visible and then sacrificing Himself so that we can be forgiven and reborn, God the Spirit sweeping across the face of the earth mysteriously calling us, wooing us back to God and for all who believe, entering inside of us and remaking us from the inside out to make us fit for the kingdom of God.

Irenaeus of Lyons, Bishop of the 2nd century had the idea that God the Father was the Head and Jesus and the Spirit were the hands – reaching out to work out our salvation. You get the picture of the Trinity at work – God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit – reaching out to pull us into their loving embrace – into the love and unity of the Trinity community – perfect love, perfect intimacy.

And then think about the Communion Table – we pray to God, the Father to send His Holy Spirit to bless and sanctify the bread and the wine and to sanctify us His people to receive it, and then God the Son, Jesus, sacramentally comes to us in the bread and wine to feed us with spiritual food. And in our taking in the Presence of Jesus, we are uniting ourselves with Christ – so that we live in Christ and He in us. And so in our union with Jesus, where are we, where are we located? We have moved into the Divine Community of Father, Son, and Spirit through Jesus Christ. We are transported by our faith and union with Christ – inside the very Triune Community of God. It's mind blowing! We may not see it, feel it, or even think about it. But spiritually what takes place for us by faith, in spiritual reality is that we are elevated and connected into God through Christ by His Spirit's work. And one day, what is only known and experienced in partial foretastes now – will one day be full and complete. The veil that separates us from seeing true spiritual reality will be lifted and WOW – we will be home with God, together all his saints, forever and ever.

I invite you... come in deeper... experience the love of God... take the Spirit's hand as
He seeks to pull you deeper... and come to our Lord's Table to meet your God!