

“OUR AWESOME, INTIMATE, EMPOWERING GOD”

Isaiah 6:1-8 - Matthew 28:16-20

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Babcock Presbyterian Church

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Trinity Sunday is set on the church calendar to contemplate the mystery of God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Of course, there's no way we can explain away this mystery, otherwise it wouldn't be a mystery. What we can say is the God we worship reveals Himself in three different ways:

The Father who created us,
The Son who saved us, and
The Sustainer who sustains us.

On past Trinity Sundays I've always tried to shed some light on this mystery, unfortunately the scriptures give us so few clues. Even so, today, I, along with other preachers, still try to give a few appropriate metaphors to help us get to know, a little better, our awesome, intimate, empowering God who created us primarily to know and enjoy Him forever.

To help simplify things, let's consider this: when we think of God the Father we see him as awesome, all powerful and knowing. When we get to know Jesus the Son, we see him as an intimate friend and brother. Then, when we contemplate the Holy Spirit, we can see the Spirit as our friend and helper.

Of course in each person of the Trinity we sense awesome power, intimacy and helpful friendship. All three attributes, and more, are in all three, but for our purposes this morning let me suggest we see:

The Father as being the Awesome One
The Son as being the Intimate One and
The Holy Spirit as being the Helpful
One.

Let's begin with the Awesome One, God the Father. One of our praise songs is "Our God is An Awesome God," in other words whenever you sense you're in God's presence, you can become overwhelmed like Isaiah, frozen in your tracks, speechless and doubled over with the feeling that even as God is holy, holy, holy, you are not, not, not. Why? You're a sinner surrounded by sinners, stripped bare of pretense, your mask ripped off and finally forced to see yourself as you really are.

Wasn't that Isaiah's experience in the Temple? "Woe is me!" he cried out. Can you see him bent over, knees knocking, his face cradled in his hands not daring to look up? God is terribly awesome, completely above and beyond us, not the old man in a white nightgown, but an unspeakable holy personality. Yes, Isaiah was filled with fear, but it was a healthy fear, a fear good for the soul.

I think there're two types of fear as far as God's concerned. A healthy fear of God simply means you're overwhelmed by God's great majestic presence. The other, the fear of evil, means you're afraid of being dehumanized and destroyed. Unfortunately, we sometimes confuse the two. Too many people are afraid of God. Even a child growing up in a loving home with well intentioned Sunday school teachers can end up afraid of God.

Maybe you developed a skewed perception of God in your childhood because you learned, not so much about a loving Father waiting for you to come home, but a by-the-book hanging judge, more intent on upholding justice than rehabilitating law breakers.

One of the most influential sermons preached in Colonial America was "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," given by Jonathan Edwards on July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut.

It was Edward's intention to scare complacent Christians into obeying God by communicating to them the horrible reality of hell.

Is there a place called hell? Jesus taught there is, but certainly that wasn't the main thrust of his teaching. Yes, those who reject God and destroy people's lives for their own empowerment have a lot to answer for, but didn't Jesus come to reintroduce us to the Abba Father Jesus cried out to in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion? Only a Father who loved his son and the world could encourage him to do what he was born to do, willingly bear our sin, even though he was completely innocent, by taking the punishment we deserve.

Which brings us to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, the Intimate One. Because God is so holy, awesome, high and beyond us, God made the decision to come down to our level through Jesus. Do you remember as a child meeting an adult for the first time? Especially if he was big and tall, how intimidating was it to have this big towering adult looking down at you while you were craning your neck to look up and make eye contact? But every once in a while a sensitive adult would bend or kneel down to your level, eye to eye and smile to smile. That's what God did for us through Jesus. God made himself vulnerable and comes down to our level. Jesus made God accessible and through Jesus gift of friendship makes love possible.

Even so, keep in mind God took a great risk from the day Christ was born up through until the day he died. There was no guarantee Jesus would submit to God's will as it was intended from the beginning. I'm not talking about the risk of whether or not Jesus would be accepted and loved. God already knew Jesus would be rejected.

Then what was the great risk taken? Simply this, when Jesus became one of us, he took on self-imposed limitations. For example, Jesus the man had the gift of free will, in other words, Jesus was vulnerable to temptation. We see this especially in Gethsemane, when Jesus could have gone either way. Instead of being the sacrificial lamb, suffering for our sins, he was absolutely free to walk away and disappear. Thank God, he didn't.

And then this: being human Jesus couldn't tell the future and know how things would turn out. Yes, he was a genius at reading the signs of the times, especially the foolish, self-serving political decisions made by the Sadducees, the conservative ruling party and the Zealots, the radical anti Roman revolutionaries, would lead to wrack and ruin. But when Jesus became flesh he gave up omnipotence. How else do you explain his ignorance about the time of his second coming? He said, not the Son of Man, not even the angels, only God himself.

So the great risk God took was Jesus giving up fore knowledge and control of outcomes making him as vulnerable as you and me to temptation and self-preservation. That was the risk God took, Jesus could have cut and run, rejecting his calling to save the world from sin. Thank God he didn't.

Yes, Jesus was certainly one of us in more ways than one, but because he kept his commitment through him God is approachable and accessible even prone to intimate friendship with those who do the Father's will.

Finally, we come to the Holy Spirit, the one who sustains and carries us through life. The Holy Spirit empowers and comforts us. The Spirit is our guide and friend.

Last week on Pentecost Sunday we concentrated on the Spirit of God. Like a mighty wind, a gentle breeze, or both, the Spirit moves in and around us, bringing life. The Spirit of God is the presence of God, with us through thick and thin helping us live with conviction.

Ever hear of the young track star from England, Derek Raymond? He was the favorite to win a gold medal in a 400 meter race. He was out in front, way ahead of everybody, but just short of the finish line, Derek fell down, writhing in pain right in front of the Royal reviewing stand where all the celebrities were sitting. Right then and there before anyone knew what was happening, Derek's father jumped out of the stands lifted his injured son off the ground, put the runner's arm around his shoulder and dragged his son across the finish line. Derek didn't win, but thanks to his Dad, he finished.

That's what the Holy Spirit does for us. You're never guaranteed you'll always win, nor does God promise you'll never experience set backs and hard times, but God does promise His empowerment and guidance through the ups and downs, your victories and defeats. You'll always be empowered to always finish.

One more thing to remember, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit isn't simply an ancient, worn out orthodox doctrine, indeed the Trinity is a dynamic life-giving love affair, void of jealousy and conflict, with no pulling rank or undermining each other.

On the contrary the Father, Son and Holy Spirit bend over backwards deferring to each other, never regarding equality with each other as something to be exploited; instead each humbles himself to raise the other up. Perfect harmony and unity guaranteeing beloved community.

And here's the Good News, Jesus became one of us, in perfect sinless humility, to invite us into this mysterious relationship of the Three Persons in One God, so we may enter into intimate friendship with God.

All this is made possible because we were created to belong to God. As the Apostle Paul put it, "we are the children of God...and joint heirs with Christ..." (Romans 8:11)

The boxer George Foreman did something unusual for his sons naming them all George, after himself. Why? Because George, Sr. never knew his father. He always carried a sense of hurt and shame with an incomplete sense of himself because he never had a father in his life. George Foreman wanted to make sure his sons had identity he never had. That's why he gave each of them his name.

God gives each of us a name. We are God's sons and daughters, Christ's brothers and sisters and the Spirit's friends and helpers and through these identities, we too, can be awesome, intimate and empowering human beings as we worship, serve and love the God who created us, saved us and sustains us through life.

Let us pray!