

## Sermon for Trinity Sunday, June 3, 2012 "It Ain't Me, Lord"

If there is one word that can link all three of the Scripture passages that we have heard on this Trinity Sunday, it is this: confusion. It's an apt word, because this is the day we ponder the Trinity, and there is no doctrine that is more difficult for us to grasp than that of the Trinity – three persons, one God. Not one person changing into another person at a given time, with a specific agenda at that point. Not three people taking turns at being God. No, all three existing always. And that's a hard one for us to understand.

But that is not the confusion I'm speaking of today. No, the confusion is a little different. Take a look at the passage from Isaiah: it is the story of God's call to Isaiah to be a prophet in the midst of a disastrous political environment for the people of Judah. There is a strange and violent appearance of God and his heavenly host. The building shakes, the room is filled with smoke. God is looking for someone, namely, Isaiah, and he wants to make sure that Isaiah knows whom he is dealing with. And what does Isaiah say? It sounds a little like an old Bob Dylan song "No, no, no, it ain't me, God. It ain't me you're looking for, God. I am not worthy. I am a man of unclean lips." God's response is to fix those unclean lips in a way that sounds unpleasant, even though it is effective: one of the angels touches Isaiah's lips with a hot coal. God says, "Okay, whom will I send to be a prophet to my people?" At that point, Isaiah seems to accept this call – perhaps he was afraid he'd get something worse than the hot coal if he said no – and says, "Here I am. Send me."

God turns Isaiah's self-doubt and sense of the way the world is supposed to work on its ear. Isaiah's confusion at this strange call is converted into affirmation.

It works like that sometimes when people are called to do something for God. Confusion is an expected part of the deal.

Turn now to Paul's Letter to the Romans. Once again, God has called his people to do things for him. Paul says we are debtors to God, because of Jesus' death on the cross. Now that should make us nervous – no one wants to be a debtor. But Paul says we should take on this indebtedness gratefully, because it is not based in fear, but in love. God's people are to serve in a new way, as God's adopted children, co-heirs with the very Jesus Christ who was responsible for our salvation. And the service we should provide to bring God's kingdom to fruition on earth will require suffering, but will also mean eventual glory.

Talk about confusing! First he says we are debtors and should serve because of that. Then he says we are debtors because God loves us. That's a new idea – usually debt and love are not two words we hear at the same time. Then he says we are equal with Jesus as heirs to the kingdom. How can that be? Jesus is God and we are most certainly not. Then he says that we've got to do stuff, and it will require suffering. Wait a minute...weren't we supposed to be heirs to the kingdom? What's all this about suffering? Oh, yeah, we'll get glory – the suffering is just part of the deal. My head hurts from Paul whipsawing me back and forth.

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And then we get to the heart of the matter, when we hear the Gospel. Here comes Nicodemus, in the middle of the night, and he's a little like the smarty-pants kid who always sits in the front row waving his hand saying "Teacher, teacher, I know the answer, I know! Pick me!"

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." And before Nicky has a chance to actually ask his question, Jesus says, "Hey wait a minute, you're close but that's not quite right. No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicky is confused. "Wait. You're telling me we've got to be born from above? That's how we get to know God? But we are already born, and some of us have been born for quite some time. Are we supposed to climb back into our mamas and get born again? That doesn't make sense, particularly since our mamas wouldn't be too thrilled about it."

And Jesus sighs and says, "Not that kind of being born, Nic. It's the kind of rebirth that happens when you are baptized in water and the Holy Spirit. I thought you were a smart guy. How could you get so confused?"

But Nicodemus is not the only one who is confused...Jesus speaks now not only to him, but to all those who are struggling and having doubts. He is saying, "pay attention now. I'm talking about things that are hard to understand, not just earthly things, but heavenly things. You need to understand these things as best you can: I am here to help you, indeed to save you, not punish you. I am here so that you can finally understand this God who loves you so deeply."

And implied in that explanation is the realization that this teaching from Jesus, even though it beggars our ability to understand it, is something that Jesus is asking us to embrace and to share, each of us in our own way.

And we hear that, and we wonder, as Isaiah did, "why would you choose me? I am an imperfect person, no particular skills for what you are asking me to do."

We hear that, and we wonder, as Paul suggests, "how can I be a suffering debtor and a co-heir with Christ of the heavenly glorious kingdom?"

We hear that, and we wonder, as Nicodemus did, "how am I supposed to understand this rebirth that you speak of and how am I supposed to convey this to others?"

Confusing. But the good news is that even in our confusion, God provides us what we need to do what he calls us to do. As a spiritual director once told me, "God equips the called, He doesn't call the equipped." God expects that we will occasionally be confused. God expects that we will need divine help. And that's why the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we talked about last week, those gifts that helped the disciples understand each other's languages, are also bestowed on us as God's adopted children.

We are all called by God. Each of us is called to different tasks, at different times of our lives, but we are most definitely called. And in the midst of the shock of the call, as Isaiah was shocked, we might be tempted to say "It ain't me, Lord. It ain't me you're looking for." But we are gifted by what God gave us in Creation, by what Jesus washed from our sinful souls through his death on the cross, by what the Spirit imbues in our souls.

We may not understand the Trinity. We may not understand God's call for us. But we can accept the gifts of the Trinity that empower us and equip us to be God's heirs and God's debtors, to bring the reign of God to its full flowering, each in our own way.

Amen.