

“Qualifying The Called”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
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Isaiah 6:1-8

John 3:1-17

*Then one of the winged creatures flew to me, holding a glowing coal
that he had taken from the altar with tongs.*

He touched my mouth and said,

“See, this has touched your lips.

Your guilt has departed, and your sin is removed.”

Isaiah 6:6-7

Let us pray... O God,

Inspire each person here to be your hands and your feet, your eyes and ears
and your voice in this world.

May we all be ready when opportunities arise each day
to just be there for someone in their need.

Amen

Today is ‘Trinity Sunday’ – the first Sunday after Pentecost
when the Christian church has traditionally celebrated
the doctrine of the Trinity.

The United Church of Christ is historically Trinitarian, meaning that
we have our roots in the early Christian church and its beliefs that arose
during the oppression and later endorsement of the Roman Empire.

We are part of that Church that competed with the monotheism of Judaism
and later endured the rise of the stricter monotheism of Islam.

OK - Do you know what the “Trinity” is? Can you describe the “Trinity”?

Could you tell someone else what the “Trinity” means?

How important is it to know about the “Trinity”?

Most times, it’s not so significant in our daily lives

that we have to explain what we believe and why we believe it.

We take it on faith that the complexities of Christian theology
can be explained in some way that makes sense.

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is one example –

and it is one of the biggest differences between Christians and
other religions that believe in God like Judaism and Islam,
but also Unitarianism and Mormonism.

Literally, the Trinity refers to God as ‘Father, Son, & Holy Spirit’ –
three specific ‘persons’ having one ‘essence’.

We proclaim it every Sunday when we sing the ‘Gloria’ and the ‘Doxology’
whether we use the traditional language or inclusive language.

We bear witness every Sunday to what we believe is true, a reality beyond words
even if we don’t quite know how or why.

That’s why it’s called ‘faith’.

Willard, p.2

It's a mystery – and like Jesus said about the Kingdom of God
which can't really be explained except by using simple parables,
the same principle applies to the Trinity by using metaphors.

Now, it is not proven that St. Patrick ever said this,
but legend has it that he used a shamrock to teach about the Trinity –
three identical leaves with a common stem.

However, apparently this is inaccurate because it is a heresy called, 'partialism'.

Another metaphor is that the Trinity is like the Sun.

Just as looking directly at the solar disk of the Sun is to risk injury to eyes,
so it is that the Heavenly Sovereign should not be taken lightly.

Just as the Sun's light illuminates the world,
so has Jesus enlightened the world through his words and deeds.

Just as the Sun's heat enables life on Earth,
so does the unseen activity of the Holy Spirit give life.

However, this, too, is a heresy called, 'Arianism'.

Still another metaphor is water which can take the form

of liquid H₂O that irrigates farmlands, steam that powers engines,
and ice that forms majestic fjords, so does God have three forms.

However, this, once again, is heresy, called, 'modalism'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw>

So, what are we to do?

Well, we can simply accept that the Trinity of God
as three distinct persons of one essence, is a mystery.

But if you really must have an explanation,

then as my Church History professor, John Paine, said,
"Pick your heresy."

I choose what amounts to be modalism:

That aspect of God that generated worlds within worlds
like a mother bears children,
bringing forth amoebas to zebras, genomes to galaxies,
is the Creator;

That aspect of God that is demonstrated in the genius of
design, inspiration, and meaning,
that whispers in the consciousness of living beings,
is the Counselor called the Holy Spirit; and

That aspect of God that walked among us
to compete and show compassion
in the commerce of human life
is the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Christ.

Willard, p.3

So, there you go. You have permission to come up with your own metaphor – your own explanation.

Learning these things is what ‘equipping the saints’ is about

As it says in Ephesians 4:12...

to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Another way of saying this is:

‘qualifying the called’, and not just ‘calling the qualified’.

You are ‘they’ and we are connected in a network called God’s Kingdom of Heaven. the Body of Christ, the Beloved Community that is possible.

which supports another tradition of our faith – ‘the priesthood of all believers’.

We are ‘qualifying the called’ to do the work that has been passed on to us.

The promise is that we are connected to Christ and connected with those people long ago of the Bible – saints and sinners alike;

We are ‘they’.

Not everyone is called to ordained ministry,

but there is a responsibility that we all have as believers in Christ.

The commitment of the UCC to be ONA – open & affirming, and specifically the advocacy of same gender marriage, has been a struggle.

But sooner than later,

there will be a sea change among other Christian denominations to be more open & affirming.

In Earth’s history, a sea change leads to either adaptation, or extinction.

In the Church’s history, there has meant reformation or revolution.

Such changes are happening here and now, and we are already there –

though it remains to be seen what that will mean for UCC at The Villages when these others churches catch up to us.

We will have to find another way to be unique – which God will show us in due time.

I believe we will do this creatively in concert with an “emerging” Church that is “progressive” in apprehending the needs of our community and of our congregation.

When we have hosted Jewish and Muslim visitors during our Peace Sunday service, we sing the Gloria and the Doxology – we proclaim the Trinity,

because that is part of who we are as the family of God called Christians.

It is critical for Christians no matter what their tradition, to be who they are,

while at the same time inviting others – and making room for them, to be who they are, too.

We as Christians can get away with worshiping with Jews and Muslims,

because we are really monotheists – believers in one God, like they are.

Willard, p.4

We just talk about God in a different way and we all need
to stop treating each other as if we were enemies –

or as if our traditions were more real than... God.

That beautiful summary of Christian faith, John 3:16, is beloved for its simplicity:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in him has eternal life.*

Bernice Powell-Jackson – former General Minister for Justice & Peace
and a colleague serving First Tampa UCC, once told me,

“It’s enough to say, *For God so loved the world – and stop right there!*”

So, you have another resource for your disciple/apostle toolkit.

You will need some more tools – like being familiar with the Bible,
not only knowing John 3:16, Psalm 23, and 1st Corinthians 13,
but knowing where to find Habakkuk or Galatians.

You need to be comfortable with praying aloud –

like talking to God like a good friend, who is all that and more.

You need to know the history and tradition and beliefs of the Christian “Church”,
the United Church of Christ, and this congregation of UCC at The Villages.

But the most important thing you need... is love – rational-lovingkindness,
because that is the ‘essence’ that connects those three ‘persons’ of the Trinity.

In closing, I invite you to join me in saying the Apostles Creed
if you know it and if you choose.

You don’t have to, because in the UCC we are covenantal not creedal –
we choose to agree together about what we believe as a group,
and not because we are told to believe a certain way.

The ancient creeds are instructive for us as they have been
for generations of Christians, providing a basis for belief
and comfort in the face of life’s challenges.

Notice that the Apostles Creed follows the Trinitarian formula about God...

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.*

Amen.

*Our lesson today is from Isaiah 6:1-8 using the Common English Bible translation.
It tells about how Isaiah answered the call to serve God
and became a prophet...*

- [6:1] In the year of King Uzziah's death,
I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne,
the edges of his robe filling the temple.
- [2] Winged creatures were stationed around him.
Each had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two their feet,
and with two they flew about.
- [3] They shouted to each other, saying:
"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of heavenly forces!
All the earth is filled with God's glory!"
- [4] The doorframe shook at the sound of their shouting,
and the house was filled with smoke.
- [5] I said,
"Mourn for me; I'm ruined!
I'm a man with unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips.
Yet I've seen the king, the Lord of heavenly forces!"
- [6] Then one of the winged creatures flew to me,
holding a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs.
- [7] He touched my mouth and said,
"See, this has touched your lips.
Your guilt has departed, and your sin is removed."
- [8] Then I heard the Lord's voice saying,
"Whom should I send, and who will go for us?"
I said, "I'm here; send me."

May we be guided and challenged by these words...

John 3:1-17 [RSV]

- [1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicode'mus,
a ruler of the [Judeans].
- [2] This man came to Jesus by night and said to him,
"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God;
for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."
- [3] Jesus answered him,
"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew,
[they] cannot see the kingdom of God."
- [4] Nicode'mus said to him,
"How can [someone] be born when [they are] old?
Can [they] enter a second time into [the] mother's womb and be born?"
- [5] Jesus answered,
"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit,
[they] cannot enter the kingdom of God.
[6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh,
and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
[7] Do not marvel that I said to you,
'You must be born anew.'
[8] The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it,
but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes;
so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."
- [9] Nicode'mus said to him,
"How can this be?"
- [10] Jesus answered him,
"Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?
[11] Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know,
and bear witness to what we have seen;
but you do not receive our testimony.
[12] If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe,
how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
[13] No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven,
the Son of man.
[14] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
so must the Son of man be lifted up,
[15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."
- [16] For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- [17] For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.