Trinity Sunday 30 May 2021

I preached my first sermon as a curate on Trinity Sunday, twenty-six years ago. And after all these years I can’t think of better words for this day than I offered then:

“If a picture paints a thousand words, then why can’t I paint you?

The words could never show the you I’ve come to know.”

The doctrine of the Trinity took over four hundred years to develop into the classic form we know, and even then, words fail. Sometimes, when I think of the arguments of those times, I want to tear my hair out and scream “This isn’t science! You can’t reduce Gd to a formula!”

Now, when we can have amazing images of our galaxy available at our fingertips, and multiple hypotheses about the universe, I think about theology developed at a time when the common understanding was that there was one planet – ours – and it was flat, and the sun revolved around it – and I am blown away trying to imagine a Gd greater than all that – words still fail.

Words fail. The ancient Jews refused to say the name of Gd – it isn’t even a pronounceable word when written – and many Jews today continue in that practice. The Holy Once is beyond our words.

And yet we claim to have been created in the image of Gd. That, too, is extraordinary, it is a mystery.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the dark – seeking illumination by night, afraid of the suspicions of some of the Jewish authorities. And when he says, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from Gd…” it appears he was speaking for a number of people, not just himself. And these were people in that group of authorities – Scriptures says Nicodemus was a ‘leader of the Jews.’

And so the writer of the Gospel of John brings together decades of that community’s teaching into words that have summarized Jesus’ mission for generations:

“Gd so loved the world that Gd gave Gd’s only Son, so that anyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. For Gd did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved by him.”

What can we say about Gd? Gd loves the world – meaning the world of human beings, the world of people and families and nations, a world that is broken, Gd-resistant and self-destructive. Gd loves *that* world.

What can we say about Gd? That the love of the Holy One for this – what I call ‘Project’ – is determined to reach us, and Gd made a way to connect in “plain language,” not through words but through a person made of flesh and blood just like us, someone caught up in the same tug-of-war that marks our living – between me and you, we and they, mine and yours, light and dark, self and Other. In the image of Gd we can go beyond the basic needs for survival and can choose to love what is ‘not me,’ becoming true reflection of Gd.

What can we say about Gd? We can join the community that was the cradle for the Gospel of John and say: Created in the image of the Holy One so that we might reflect that Image, we are the object of Gd’s eternal lovingkindness, not Gd’s wrath. Gd is faithful to the point of “full communion” – sharing our humanity – finite, mortal, fragile even – so that we can have the “picture” that paints Gd for us “in a thousand words” that become one Word – All so that we are invited into communion, into relationship with the Holy One through our trust in the things that that Picture, that Icon, Jesus, shows us.

“Gd so loved the world that Gd gave The only Son, so that anyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. For Gd did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved by him.”

When we put this together with the scene of Gd’s throne room painted for us by the prophet Isaiah, we begin to feel the Mystery that we try to put in words so that we might share the good news that Gd is for us – not against us, with us – not absent, infinite -- unknowable yet revealed in the man, Jesus.

So the next step is to ask how these words, limited and awkward as they may be, speak to us today.

Journalists and others are writing about what it will be like to come out of our bubbles and connect with people face-to-face again. I’ve read that some may find conversation difficult, how much can you say about living in lock down, working from home, juggling more balls at the same time – and how much do you want to hear? We read about people chased out of an open campground last weekend by other campers who wanted to hold sites for their friends to come party at. Getting used to getting back into the pattern of getting up and going into a workspace, and sharing the day there surrounded by people will be a challenge for some.

The first word that our confession speaks is that Gd is with us – in all those places, while we are adjusting, while we are making connections again. Gd is with us.

The second word is Love: being made in the image of Gd means we put aside self-interest in order that others may thrive with us. We may face challenges that require us to depend on Gd’s Spirit more when we feel pressured, when we have that quick retort ready on our tongues, when we find ourselves in a situation that requires us to let go or do with less. Our actions are to come from the same lovingkindness that Jesus shows us. “Forgive us our sins as we forgive others” may be put to the test as we find our way into real-time community again. We are guided by the words of the prophet Micah, to “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with Gd “– and with one another.

It goes ‘round and ‘round. We are made in Gd’s image and should reflect that image, so we try to find words to describe the Holy One who is indescribable . . . and Jesus is for us the Icon by which we can describe the Mystery that is the light by which we live and move and have our being . . . the Holy One who is indescribable . . .

A picture paints a thousand words . . . we have a picture.

Amen.