



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

Holy Trinity B – June 11, 2006

Isaiah 6:1-8

John 3:1-17

GOD'S NAME UPON US

"The voice of the Lord," sings the Psalmist this morning, "is a powerful voice!" "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters!" "The voice of the Lord splits the flames of fire!" "The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness!"

Nicodemus has been searching ... seeking the voice of the Lord, studying the voice of the Lord, testing the voice of the Lord, searching for the singular voice which makes his life fit together and make sense and become whole! Nicodemus is one of us! A thoroughly modern individual, educated, capable, respected, religious. Truly a leader! But, as Jack Dean Kingsbury puts it, "Nicodemus is not quite sure why he wakes in the night." "Nor is he sure why he wakes in the morning."

And so, as John's Gospel puts it: "Nicodemus comes to Jesus **by night!**" Secretly, searching, confused, covertly. And as we watch the dialogue develop, we see Jesus challenge Nicodemus and you and me – thoroughly modern individuals that we are – to define our selves differently, to define our lives differently, to define our reason for being differently! To define all that we have and all that we are. Not on the basis of who we are, but rather whose we are. Not on the basis of what we do, but rather what has been done for us. Not on the basis of result, but rather on the basis of relationships. Jesus challenges Nicodemus and you and me to enter a Kingdom which does not fit into our previous understanding of how life is, but which requires a new birth from above to enter the realm of right relationship to God as a child of the Father, by the blood of the Son, through the power of the Spirit!

Nicodemus hears the voice of the Lord place upon him this new reality. Today you and I hear the voice of the Lord place upon us this same new reality! Place God's Name upon us and invite us to call God by name, declare us to be the Father's people and the Son's people and the Spirit's people! Invite us to be born anew from above into this realm of right relationship Jesus calls "The Kingdom of God!"

Indeed, the Trinity Sunday is the festival celebration of the Name of God. It proclaims the great good news that the voice of the Lord speaks upon the waters of our Baptism and speaks through the flames of Pentecost to know us and name us, to claim us and keep us, to shape us and send us! The voice of the Lord places God's Name upon us, defines us differently, declares us to be and challenges us. And challenges us to become: the Father's people and the Son's people and the Spirit's people.

We are the Father's people! The voice of the Lord places the Father's Name upon our head. We walk upright. We stand taller than the rest of Creation. We are the crown of God's Creation: "a little less than the angels," according to Psalm 8. God gives us dominion over God's Creation – the word means lordship – "to till it and keep it" or to trash it and kill it... God makes us like God over God's Creation. Yet we are but creatures ourselves, and therefore children of the Heavenly Father and stewards of the mysteries of God. God has put it into our head and with great good humor into our belly button to know this! And today God reminds us to remember this deep dependence.

We are the Father's People! And we are the Son's People! The voice of the Lord places the Son's Name upon our heart. For this is the heart of the matter. It is the blood of the Son which saves us. It is the blood of the Son which sustains us. And it is in the blood of our own heart and in the heart of our own self that we feel this and know this and are warmed by this. And are compelled by the force of this fact we feel to be different and to make a difference!

We are the Father's people. We are the Son's people. And we are the Spirit's people! The voice of the Lord places the Spirit's Name upon our feet and upon our hands. Because it is our feet which can change our direction so that we are going God's way – rather than our own way. And it is our hands which can change our focus from being self-centered to being God-centered. Even as they stop being pointing fingers and start becoming helping hands! It is our feet and our hands together which demonstrate the change God's Holy Spirit is always working in us. Making us different, empowering us to make a difference. We cannot see the Spirit, but we can see what the Spirit does! The true test of whether the Spirit is within a person or a people or a congregation is whether their hands and their feet are doing the work of God.

The voice of the Lord places God's Name upon us and invites us to call God by Name! We are the Father's people. We are the Son's people. We are the Spirit's people. One of the things which intrigues me about Trinity Sunday is that it gives us the opportunity to combine theology and geometry! What does "one in three" and "three in one" look like? One of my favorite Confirmation activities as we study together the three parts of the Apostles' Creed which describe the three persons of the Trinity is to ask the students to construct a three-dimensional model which displays how "The Trinity" looks for them. Because the point, of course, is that these relationships within God's own self and between us and God shape us!

Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord and volunteers: "Here am I! Send me! Nicodemus hears the voice of the Lord and becomes one of the central figures in the Gospel story of Jesus, responsible for the single most quoted verse in the entire Bible. How will the voice of the Lord shape us – shape you and shape me and shape our life and ministry at St. Michael's in the year to come? Because we are the Father's people and the Son's people and the Spirit's people and the voice of the Lord is upon us!