

"Trinity"

Genesis 1:1-2:4 & Matthew 18:16-20

May18, 2008

Sunday, May 18th holds special memories for my. I know that for many it is nothing more than the day after Sytten de mai - Norwegian Independence Day. But for me - every May 18th is a time for reflection - and especially so when it falls on a Sunday. Does anyone here know what happened on May 18th? Maybe it would help to know that the year was 1980.

It was a beautiful, sunny Sunday morning. It was early when I got to church for our first worship service at 8:30. There were a lot of church events planned for that day - it would be a busy day - all day. But before the end of the service, the Senior Pastor with who I was serving received a phone call from His family in Southern California, desperate to learn if any of us were still alive. It seems that while we were quietly worship, Mount Saint Helens had erupted with a furry. At the time I was living in Longview, Washington - a town that was only 30 miles [as the crow flies - about 55 miles by twisting mountain road] from that beautiful mountain peak. The blast was heard hundreds of miles away to the north and west. Even here in Bottineau, approximately 1200 miles to the East, I understand that you received a light dusting of ash. But as we worshiped, we were oblivious to the incredible event that had just taken place.

In just a moment, radical changes took place. Some, like that man who lived at Spirit Lake at the base of the mountain - a man who proclaimed that 'his mountain would never hurt him', were killed instantly as the mountain fell on him. Most had left the 'red zone' - some were nearby and had no chance of outrunning the 'superheated gasses' that moved outward from the heart of the eruption. Suddenly the face of our beautiful, peaceful little world was changed beyond our imagination. If the blast had knocked out more of the west / south west side of the mountain, perhaps Longview may have experienced more of the destructive power of creation. But we were safe and simply stood in awe of the incredible power unleashed by nature that morning in the blink of an eye. Suddenly, the days activities were not so important. Suddenly, everyone was forced to ponder life and the mysteries of creation.

Suddenly - in some ways that is the critical word. Though we knew it was imminent - we did not fathom what a volcanic eruption was really meant. Suddenly suddenly and earthquake hits in China and some 50, 000 die. Suddenly, disaster strikes in Burma and there is death and destruction on a scale that I can not really imagine. Suddenly and our quiet,

peaceful world is shaken. Suddenly and we begin to ask questions about God.

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday in the life of the church. It is a great time to engage in deep theological debates about the nature of God. Some people really enjoy being involved in those kinds of discussions. But I suspect that most may give the discussion a few minutes and then look at the "suddenly" moments of their lives and get frustrated with the irrelevance of trying to understand the three persons of the Trinity. The three scriptures that were read this morning point us to the images of a triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - but I am convinced that most don't really care about the distinctions - they just want a God that can speak to the devastating moments of their lives.

There is an ancient story about St. Augustine that sounds like it is made up to me - but it is cute. One day he took a break from writing about the Trinity to take a walk along the seashore. There he came across a child with a little pail, intently scooping up a pail full of water out of the ocean, then walking up the beach and dumping it out into the sand, then going back down to scoop out another pail of water to pour into the sand, bucket after bucket. Augustine asked the child what he was doing, and the child explained that he was going to "empty the ocean out onto the sand." When the Bishop tried to gently point out the absurd impossibility of this task, the child replied, "Ah, but I bet I'll drain the ocean before you understand the Trinity."

I think that too often we do things that are a bit irrational. We could talk about the Trinity until the ocean is emptied and never really understand but frankly, when held up against the devastation and the big or even smaller events we see and experience in our lives I am thinking that many would not really care about the fine theological points. In the midst of all that we experience in our lives, what we really need to know that there is a God - - - and that God is with you. Do you believe it today? Do you who listen on your radios or watch on TV believe it today? Do your friends and family believe it today. The mission that is set forth for the believers in today's Gospel text is that we be very diligent to teach and make disciples - help people to believe and come to understand make disciples - because those suddenly moments happen and when they happen there is no time to talk about 'the trinity' or a lot of theological stuff. When 'suddenly' happens all you may have time to do is reach out and grab hold of the robes of God.

I read this week about a letter written by Albert Einstein that was supposed to have been placed up for auction this past Wednesday. I have not heard how the auction went but they we expecting the brief handwritten letter to go for between 12 and 16 thousand dollars. In it, Einstein said that **"the**

word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honorable but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish." Einstein had some quirky religious beliefs. He is famous for saying: "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." He also said: "I do not believe in the God of theology who rewards good and punishes evil. My God created laws that take care of that. His universe is not ruled by wishful thinking, but by immutable laws." He was a brilliant man - but all mixed up in what he believed about God. He is brilliance he helped us to understand the laws of nature and gave us the theories to help develop that atom bomb.

We can understand so much - and so much is beyond our understanding. And in the midst of it all we often need to know only one simple thing - is there a loving God to whom we can turn?

And the creations story {quite apart from point to the presence of the three persons of the trinity - God / the word / the breath} we learn that it was God who was present from the beginning who called forth a good creation. In the second lesson we are invited to know and live in the peace of this loving God even when relationships and world events have brought chaos. And finally, the Gospel tells us that as we go out into a confusing world, God is with us always!

Do you believe it? Does it give you comfort? Those 'suddenly' moments will surely come. Know that God is there!

AMEN