

Year B

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 29

Romans 8:12-17

John 3:1-17

Last weekend there was a wedding. Some of you may have heard about it. Did any of you see it? It wasn't a quiet, little, unpretentious wedding in a country church; it was a royal wedding in St. George's Chapel in Windsor castle. Hard to miss. Our own Presiding Bishop, Bishop Curry, was the preacher and for 14 minutes he talked about love and the power of love. Talking about love is most appropriate at a wedding. The fact that two people had fallen in love and decided they wanted to spend their lives together was the whole reason for the wedding in the first place.

But love isn't just about romance. Love can be many things and it can happen in many ways and between all sorts of people. All last week, I was attending the Festival of Homiletics in DC. I had no idea what to expect, but on the first day I was simply blown away four times in one day by four different speakers. By the end of the week, I was completely spent. Thursday night was the service at National City Christian Church for Reclaiming Jesus. There was Standing Room Only in a sanctuary designed to hold 1000+ and Bishop Curry was one of the speakers. We concluded the service with a silent, candlelit procession to the White House where we prayed and sang. I wish I could recreate for you the power of the spirit that was there among these people. The fact that 1000 people could walk together in complete silence was, in itself, a powerful experience. The whole week was like Church Camp for grown-ups and I wish I could bring that mountaintop experience to you. I don't know that I can, but one thing's for sure: as I listened to other clergy talk about their congregations, I came to realize how especially wonderful this congregation is. St. Paul's is the vision of the future that everyone is dreaming about. And my colleagues would surrender plenty to have the kind of faithfulness that is present in each of you. I am so thankful for you and recognize what a blessing you are to me! The Spirit is so obviously present here. Last week after our joint service with St. Patrick's, several of that congregation came to tell me just that! And I confirmed it!! There's all kinds of love here.

We've all experienced love in one form or another. There is the love between a parent and a child. There is love between brothers and sisters. There is the love between best friends. There is love that we feel for the work that we do or the talent that we develop. There is love for beauty that surrounds us or the dreams that we have. But it's always about relationship of some kind. It's something that happens between us and someone or something else. It is a 'thing'...a noun and it is also a verb. It has little meaning without some action used to express it. It's something that is and something we feel and something we do. And it is the essence of the Trinity.

We say that God is love...and if God is love, then it is expressed and experienced in relationship. In terms of the trinity God is the relationship between and among the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Those three entities are in relationship with each other and the unity of that relationship is love itself...God.

Our destiny does not lie in our ability to figure out the Trinity. It is clearly a mystery. Our destiny lies in our willingness to enter into that relationship.

The history of what we know about God's relationship with creation from the Old Testament through the New Testament is a love story. It begins with God's creation of the world and all that is in it culminating in the creation of human beings. The history of God's continued relationship with creation lies in what we know of God's continued pursuit of us as human beings. God wants to be in a relationship with us. Apparently, we are worth it. In spite of all our shortcomings, foibles, distance, apathy and disobedience, God still wants to be in a relationship with us. God does not relent. God does not give up. God does not abandon. And all the relationship entities that comprise God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; pursue us in different ways.

God, our Father is our creator. He made us...each and every one of us. He knit us together in our mother's womb. He knows every hair on our heads. He is the source of all that is provided to us for our survival. He knows the innermost longings and secrets of our hearts. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And he still loves us. Apparently, we are worth it.

God, the Son, Jesus is our redeemer and our savior. In Greek, the word that is translated as 'save' is *sozo*. That word can be translated as 'saved' or 'rescued' or 'healed' or 'made whole.' On our own, we are broken. Things don't work quite right. Our bodies may be functioning just beautifully, but our spirits may be broken or our souls may be wounded. Jesus is our healer and Jesus is the one who makes us whole. Whatever has happened to us in this life that has broken us or wounded us is healed by the loving touch of the Son, Jesus. Jesus loved us enough to take on our human nature, to become human as we are, so that he could be in relationship with us in terms that we could understand. He bridged the gaping hole of death to reconcile us to God. Apparently, we are worth it.

God, the Holy Spirit is our Holy Comforter, our companion. It is described to us in terms that we can understand...as the wind. We can't see it. We don't know where it came from or where it is going, but we can feel it. We know it's there. It can be ferocious enough to frighten us as the violent wind that rattles the windows, uproots trees or flattens buildings and it can be as gentle and as soft as a warm breeze or a baby's sigh. It comes alongside our own spirit...each breath we take...to be with us always. It nudges and cajoles...comforts and stirs...energizes and inspires...even as our own spirits sag or weaken. The Holy Spirit stays with us and sustains us when our own spirit is ready to give up. Apparently, we are worth it.

We listened this morning to the conversation between the Pharisee Nicodemus and Jesus. It's a conversation we probably could have ourselves. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about being 'born from above' and what Nicodemus hears is 'born again.' Doesn't that happen to us as well? Someone says one thing and we hear something else. Communication...even if it's with Jesus...is not always easy! What makes it even more confusing is that the Greek word used in this

conversation, *anōthen*, can be translated either way. When Jesus speaks about being ‘born from above’ by water and the spirit, he is speaking about the Trinity itself. If we follow Nicodemus’ continuing questions, it’s easy to see that he has interpreted the word as ‘born again’ and he is truly confused. If we follow Jesus’ continuing conversation, it becomes clear that Jesus is talking about ‘born from above.’

And when we are ‘born from above,’ we allow God to change our perspective...to change our outlook...to change our minds and our hearts about how we see ourselves, how we see God and how we see the world around us including all the people that people our lives. And it’s an ongoing process! God...the triune God...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...continuously interact with us and shape and transform us because we have agreed to be in a relationship!

The relationship has always been offered to us. We haven’t always responded accordingly. We’ve probably all had the experience of trying to be in a relationship with someone who doesn’t want to be in a relationship with us. After a while, we usually give up. God doesn’t. God consistently patiently, lovingly, continues to offer to be in relationship with us. God is always available for relationship because apparently, God thinks we’re worth it!

It is in accepting God’s invitation to relationship that we enter into eternal life...and it happens in *this* life. It is not something that is out there in the distance somewhere...something that we have to die to experience. We can begin to taste it now...in this life. It comes in glimpses of those heart-melting moments when someone’s words are a balm to our soul, or in that spontaneous laughter that we share with another, or that hug that just seems to hold us together and convince us that at least for that moment all is right with the world. It happens so often in a relationship with someone else, but even in those silent, still moments when we are touched with wonder at the beauty of the creation that surrounds us, we are in a relationship...a relationship with God, appreciating God’s handiwork.

Eternal life begins in this life. Eternal life is shaped by and utterly dependent upon God’s love. It’s not something that we do or something that we earn. It is God’s gift to us. It is a mystery. And it begins the moment we come to believe in and entrust our own life to Jesus. He came to earth to get us. All we have to do is agree to love him back and go with him.

Every part of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; wants every part of each one of us in a loving relationship. All we need to do is say, “Yes” and show our love for God by keeping the commandments: To love God and to love our neighbors...all of our neighbors!

And apparently, the Triune God thinks we are worth it!

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.