

Isaiah 6:1-8  
Psalm 29  
Romans 8:12-17

It feels like we've gotten a 'get out of jail free' card, doesn't it? It's been a long year and it's going to take us a while to recover. During this pandemic year, we've found out a lot about ourselves and about our country and about the world around us. We've discovered what's important to us individually and what's necessary for us as a country and as a world. Before the pandemic there were so many things about our day-to-day life that went unexamined and that we took for granted. The silence and the restrictions forced on us by the pandemic helped us discover what's most important to us and what's expendable. Almost all of us discovered how much we need to be around people...family, friends, neighbors even other anonymous people that we pass in the grocery store or on a walk. We discovered that we desperately need other people...up close and personal or at a distance. We simply need to be around and even to interact with other people. We have an instinct to connect with others even on the most superficial level. And it doesn't seem to matter how introverted we are or how extroverted we are. We all need other people in some form or another.

But even more than just needing other people, each of us has a deep longing to feel like we belong...somewhere and to some one or to a family of some kind. There is a longing for the kind of intimacy that feels like 'home.' We all know it when we find it. As the poet Robert Frost put it: "Home is the place where when you go there, they have to take you in." It's the place where we belong...whether it's a happy place or not. It's ours and we all feel betrayed when we lose it or when it is in some way broken. Ideally, it is a place where we are able to experience safety and the reliability of its existence, as well as a place of a deeper trust. That feeling of trust and safety is critical to each one of us, so when we find that place or the people that can create that place for us we cling to it tenaciously. There is a German word for it which doesn't exactly translate into English; but the word is *Heimat*. In terms of our emotional well-being and our psyche, there seems to be nothing more valuable or necessary for us than *Heimat*. Hopefully, each of us grew up in a home that provided *Heimat* for us. As we move into adulthood, we

search for such a place and/or person who provides that for us. If the home of our childhood didn't provide *Heimat*, it's a little harder to find it as an adult, but we will search for it anyway and we do recognize it when we find it. It's the feeling of having come "home" to the place we always dreamed home should be. *Heimat* gives us a sense of belonging as well as a sense of safety. In many respects our church provides *Heimat* for us. It's familiar. We have memories and relationships here. It is a safe place where we know that we belong...not only to God, but to each other.

Our celebration this morning is about just such a place for each one of us...Not just the church itself, but the central element of the church...the Trinity...God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Have you ever thought of being with God as being 'at home?' God is our Creator and knows us better than anyone and loves us more than anyone and wants the best for us...more than anyone. But very few of us have been obedient and compliant children. God pursues us with an intensity that sometimes stuns us, but God never gives up on us. God's loving arms are always wide open, but we don't necessarily believe that or trust that.

It's hard for us to wrap our brains around the concept of the three in one. That seems impossible to our finite human brains to comprehend, but with God all things are possible. We know that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus immediately after his baptism. It provided Jesus with comfort and strength during his battle with Satan in the wilderness. We know that Jesus was in conversation with God on a regular basis because there are many references to Jesus removing himself from the crowds and retreating to a quiet place where he could pray. His ongoing conversations with God not only taught us how to pray, but modelled for us how important prayer is...how important it is to be in an ongoing conversation with God on a daily basis...sometimes on an hourly basis.

The three of them...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...are in relationship with each other. The three of them formed a little community of love and mutual support. They showed us how it's done. They each have different functions and each of them is separate and unique, but they are a unit...perhaps the original prototype for *Heimat*. They belong together. They are safe with each other. They depend on each other. They trust one another. Each of them is God, but none

of them can be either of the other two. We were warned, by the way, in seminary that we can't talk about the Trinity for more than about thirty seconds without wandering into territory that is heresy! I think I just did!!

But the love among the three...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...is unmistakable. The interaction among the three of them is a demonstration of love in its purest form. It's the heart of our sense of feeling like we belong. The sense of safety and trust that each one of them...Father, Son and Holy Spirit... provides for the other two is showing us the nature of God. Even though Jesus begged God to let him off the hook before the crucifixion, God knew that Jesus would go through with it. And Jesus knew that God would not abandon him even if it felt like He had when Jesus was on the cross. And the Holy Spirit fortified Jesus when He needed it most...alone in the wilderness with Satan...and Jesus knew that the Holy Spirit would see him through that difficult time. The love, the trust, the sense of safety with one another and the profound sense of belonging is what all of us look for in this life. God provides all of that to each one of us. God shows us in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit what love in action looks like. It's not that God is untrustworthy. That's not what keeps us away. It's our own inability and unwillingness to trust God that keeps us standing at a distance from God. Do we always know what is best for us? No, we don't. Do we always ask for the right things when we pray? No, we don't. Do we 'make bargains' with God? Sometimes. Does God take us up on those bargains? No, God doesn't. Is God standing with us when things don't work out well? Absolutely. Does God show us what perfect love looks like in the Trinity? Yes. God does.

This little community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is what love is all about and all of us have heard all our lives that God *is* love. We sometimes don't comprehend quite what that means, although we know for sure when we are on the receiving end of love. If you've ever experienced love or you've even witnessed love, you know exactly what God is all about. And you understand the community that is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. What transpires among them is what we call 'love.' This love is the glue that keeps them connected to one another. And it is the glue that keeps all of us connected to others in this life...as well as to God. The necessity to forgive and to mend broken relationships is not the result of love failing

or being absent. It is the result of our own fallibility...our own penchant for making mistakes. Love doesn't fail. But sometimes we do.

During his ministry here on earth, Jesus showed us by his actions what love looks like. He impressed upon his followers the need to forgive one another...and ourselves. He gave us the rules for living together in community and he taught us what to do when we make mistakes. The Church is his legacy...the body of Christ in the world. The Church is actually a laboratory where we can practice all the things that Jesus taught us about how he wants us to usher in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is perfect, but the Church is not. If you don't practice Christianity anywhere else, you need to practice it in the church family you have chosen. It's the only laboratory we have to practice Christianity the way Jesus taught it to us. Is it easy? Absolutely not! We need to be in constant contact with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in order to do what we need to do to follow Jesus' example. We can't do that by ourselves. We have God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to supply our needs and to show us the way and to help us move in the world as the body of Christ. All we need to do is make the daily commitment...over and over again...to do just that. And then we need to listen and follow directions. We need to sink into that sense of belonging in the church body we have chosen. And we need to work to make others feel as though they belong just as we do. We are all in search of *Heimat*. With God's help we will find it in our church home and we will provide it to others who come to us to be in our midst. They need that sense of belonging just as we do.

On more than one occasion, someone has stood in this sanctuary and told me that these walls are covered in prayer and that this sanctuary is filled with the Holy Spirit. I expect most of you, if not all of you, have experienced the same thing.

The Trinity *is* the Kingdom of God.

The Trinity supplies all our needs.

The Trinity provides us with *Heimat*.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.