

*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Friday afternoon I was talking with Bill Higgins the younger, and I asked him about how I affect the mood of our worship. "Serious is the mood you bring," he said. "Worship is serious when you lead it," and I understood him to be saying somber, also. But then he said something that surprised me. "It was not until I became janitor for the church that I saw another side of you." It surprised me because even as I stand here before you today, there is a playful me here, inside of me, a me that used to rig up water balloons over people's doors in my college dormitory, and a me that is a terrible tease. There is a me inside who looks at flowers and is filled with delight at their beauty, and who hears the songs from the sixties and is twenty five years younger as he sings along. There is a me that is always ready for a game of cards or a trip down to the stadium.

But standing before you, dressed like this, all of those me's get lost under stole and robe liturgy. You see me as pastor here, not as person. And I act as pastor here, being what you expect me to be.

Well, today it is going to be different. I'm getting rid of the robe, and the stole and the cross. I'll leave them up here; I'm coming down to be a person with you.

How do you like this? Different, isn't it? Now I'm exactly the same person who was up there a few moments ago, but I don't seem the same to you.

Now I get to see the things you see, cheerios and paper being doodled upon.

Well, I've got a sermon to finish so I guess I'd better get back at it.

Today is Trinity Sunday. On this day we stop to think about our God as one God in three persons. I've picked this new spot from which to finish my sermon because I want to use your imagination and memory to see me in those other two places in which I've been this morning.

First, see me in the pulpit. Somber, serious, looking down, distant, seeing from afar. Maybe we think of God the Father like that - one not at all like us - certainly not one with us.

Now remember me as I moved among you. One person, but now close by, seeing things from your perspective, and being seen by you in a very different way. Think of Jesus in this way, no longer distant, different, but perspiring in the heat, and taking a seat beside us, seeing us one by one. One with the Father is Jesus, one God, even as I cannot be split in two, our God is one. Everything that is there in the Father is in the Son, and everything that is in the Son is in the Father. But as Jesus stands among us we see God in a way that we had never seen God before.

And because Jesus is also one of us, maybe we could say that God sees us humans in a way that God has never seen us before either.

Now when I took off my robes and came down out of the pulpit this morning some of you may have liked it but I'm guessing a lot of you did not. "What's he going to do when he comes near me?" you might have wondered.

Or maybe you thought, "Why can't he stay where he belongs, and dressed the way he should be dressed, this isn't dignified."

Maybe you felt exposed as I looked at you. You are used to looking at me, feeling safe as you are lost in the crowd.

When God came down in Jesus to be a person among persons, some received him with joy, but most were upset. Some said he should not be rubbing shoulders with every day folks - with tax collectors and sinners.

Some did not like the stories he told about priests and Levites who passed by the wounded man by the road, and the Samaritan who stopped to help.

Some were offended by words he taught of turning the other cheek, and praying for enemies.

But mostly they were upset because God belonged far away, in pulpits and in churches and not in factories and offices and bars.

But God so loved the world, that he was not content to remain where the world thought he should be, but he sent his only Son into the world, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus, who came down to us, is the Father's gift to us, in his living, and in his dying, that we might see God as God is, and know God for all eternity.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What of this third person in the Trinity?

To understand the Holy Spirit, I begin with John 3:16 once more.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

In Jesus God was able to encounter humans one by one - even able to feed five thousand at one time. But during the years of Jesus ministry there were millions alive on earth, and almost all of them never heard Jesus, or saw him.

Yet God so loved the world.....that he gave his Spirit to the church. The Spirit from God the Father and God the Son Jesus breathed into the apostles and all whom they brought to faith.

In our second lesson we hear these words: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

You as you are led by God's Spirit are Christ in the world. As Jesus once brought God into homes and vineyards and synagogues, now you who are led by the Spirit of God are God's presences in every place where you go. You are God's children as Jesus was God's child. The one God, Father Son and Holy Spirit entered into you in your baptism, because God so loves the world.

God wants the world to know God's love in you, through you. You are called to be a little Christ, to join the only Son of God in giving your life for others. As you do then the hungry and the homeless and the people where you work will no longer know God as one far away, different, deadly serious. No, they will know that God is among them, as his own Spirit embraces them through you.

For God so loves the world.

And as they trust the love of God poured out to them through you, you will tell of that greatest love of all, as the Son of God was given on the cross, that we might have eternal life. God's Spirit will give you words to say to them, "In Christ your sins are forgiven, In Christ you have everlasting salvation - believe in him."

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”