

Beyond Easy Answers!

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.
[Isaiah 6:3]

One of the modules I taught to A level students in Religious Studies was 'Psychology and Religion.' In that we examined Freud's criticisms of religion.

He suggests that everyone needs totems - sacred objects that serve as emblems or mascots for different groups - and that God is merely an extension of what we perceive our fathers to be, or should be.

Freud, along with some of the other philosophers (like Feuerbach), conclude that religion isn't real but is simply a crutch for people who can't cope on their own.

On this Trinity Sunday we have evidence that is fairly convincing (to me, at least) that the God Christians worship isn't just the idealised Father figure or a crutch that we have invented.

No-one in their right minds would come up with such a complicated and convoluted idea that we worship one God, but that we know that God as three unique persons and personalities: they are distinct but indivisible; separate yet inseparable.

The Council of Nicaea was called in 325, gathering all the bishops of the early Church together, to settle part of this issue.

Some people had fallen into the error of thinking that Jesus was more human than he was God (Arius - whose teaching forms the foundation on which the Jehovah's Witnesses build).

Others thought that he was more God than human (Apollinarius) - both of which were errors.

- * Amongst the things that it concluded it forbade people kneeling in Church on Sundays and in the Season of Easter because kneeling is a penitential act and not appropriate for a forgiven people who had a lot to rejoice about.

- * It also gave us the first version of the Nicene Creed (which we say in most Sundays) - with the insistence that Jesus is fully God and fully human.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;

It took another 35 years and another Council of the Church in Constantinople before the doctrine of the Trinity was more precisely defined and until 451 at the Council of Chalcedon before the Church settled the theology completely.

I could go on - but this is one area that the more you study the less you understand!

What is clear in the readings for today is that what matters is not how much we understand about God but rather how we experience God. This becomes clear in the three great passages we have for today:

ISAIAH - experiencing the Father

Isaiah must have had an intestinal crisis with what he witnessed. He had arrived in the Temple expecting condemnation but leaves with absolution, having had his senses challenged.

- * He *saw* God - you didn't see that and live (but this was a key moment - God had been absent from Judah - King Uzziah had been a bad lot and so now he is out of the way it is a new chapter).
- * He *heard* the worship of heaven - the scene is busy and noisy: a temple full of God and angels and the noise of them singing the super-superlative of **Holy, Holy, Holy!**
- * He *felt* the coal from the altar - knowing that the altar was a place of sacrifice and that fire was a symbol of God's wrath - and instead of death he is forgiven!
- * God then asks for a volunteer and Isaiah is at the front of the line before he knows what the job is.

We experience a Holy God - and that changes us!

ROMANS - experiencing the Holy Spirit

Paul begins Romans 8 with the bold statement **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** and is working up to declare **all things work together for good for those who love God** and goes on to conclude that **nothing... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**. This is heady stuff

- * We have no real parallel today to the enormity of what Paul is saying here - the slave becomes the child and goes from owning nothing to owning everything!
- * We are children of God the Father, brothers and sisters with Jesus and the God the Holy Spirit makes us comfortable with it all (*Abba* is familiar but respectful - and here Freud may have a point with his father-figure-deity).

We experience an accepting God - and that is something to live up to!

JOHN - experiencing the Son

Nicodemus was impressed by Jesus as a teacher - but before he openly becomes a follower of Jesus he wants to know if this is kingdom of God that the Jews have been waiting for.

In another of the things that stretch our understanding he arrives under cover of darkness wanting to find illumination.

Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, knows his subject - but he doesn't understand it!

His key question - ***Do you experience God in Jesus?***

- * Jesus tells him that he has to be **born again*** - which Calvin explains as *not an amendment of the part but the renewal of the whole nature*. We start our lives again with God.
- * God the Father loves us - God the Son dies for us - God the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to start again.

We experience a renewing God - and that transforms us!

I am no engineer - so I don't understand the optimum angles for crutches to work or the leverage involved.

You may not be a theologian and understand the workings of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What I do know is that if I have broken a leg I need something to lean on that works. I didn't invent it but I am glad that it is there!

I also know that we can trust our experience of God even if we can't adequately put it into words - and what sort of God would it be if they could be neatly packed in human understanding?