

Let's Try and Explain These Things!

Trinity Sunday, June 11, In the Year of Our LORD, 2006

Gates Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

Carolyn Thornton and Allison Tuttle, Lay Preachers

Isaiah 6:1-8 and John 3:1-17

Ralph: Today, on Children's Day, I have asked two young ladies to help me with the sermon. Every Sunday, we read from the Bible and then we try to see how it makes sense to us – and today, in particular, we are going to try to explain some important and some people think complicated things as best we can. In order to do that, I invited Carolyn Thornton and Allison Tuttle to join me in this sermon. I invite them to come up and stand with me.

Ralph: Isaiah was one of only a few people to ever see God – and a few moments ago, some of our younger disciples read from the sixth chapter of Isaiah. In that section, Isaiah tried to describe God. This is a pretty complicated picture! I am not sure these words from the Bible help me much! Did you know that no one really knows what a seraphim is? The best guess is that is some kind of winged serpent!

Carolyn: Too bad people didn't have Kodak cameras back then!

Ralph: What do you suppose God looks like?

Carolyn: I think everyone has a different idea of what God looks like, don't you?

Ralph: I think you are right.

Carolyn: Can I tell a story? Once there was a little girl in Sunday School. She wasn't paying attention to the teacher. She was busy drawing something with crayons. She was *very* busy! I am going to pretend I am the teacher. Allison will pretend to be the little girl.

[we will have a table and chair set up for Allison to use to pretend to draw]

Carolyn : What are you doing?

Allison: I am drawing a picture of God!

Carolyn: You are drawing a picture of God?

Allison: Yep, that's right, a picture of God!

Carolyn: But, no one knows what God looks like!

Allison: They *will* when I get through with this drawing!

Ralph: That girl was pretty sure of herself, wasn't she?

Carolyn: Maybe, but like Isaiah, she had a good idea what God looked like to her. I think that is what matters. I know what God looks like when I think about God – and Allison knows what God looks like when she thinks about.

Ralph: That is a pretty good explanation. But sometimes, things in church and in the Bible get pretty complicated. For example, today is "Trinity Sunday." Kids know what a triangle is, but to try to explain how we have one God that is Father, Son *and* Holy Spirit is hard even for adults to understand. People ask, do we have one God or three?

Allison: I can help with that one! I can help with that one! Look at this apple. There is only one apple. But look again, there are three parts – there is the peel, the yummy part inside, and in the middle are the seeds. How many apples do I have in my hand?

Carolyn: (sarcastically) One.

Allison: But how many parts?

Carolyn: (again sarcastically) I get it! There are three parts – but one apple. One God, three parts.

Allison: I know you get it, but just think, God, Who made us –

Ralph: God the Creator.

Allison: Yeah, God the Creator, - is a little bit like the outside of this apple – the peel tells us it is an apple, the color tells us what kind of apple it is, and even though apples come in all different sizes, the outside tells us what it is – just as God makes us what we are! Then there is the middle – the part we eat, the part we really like, the part that fills our stomachs – a little bit like how Jesus fills us with all kinds of good things!

Ralph: And I suppose the seeds

Carolyn: (politely taking the apple from Allison) And the seeds – they are like seeds of love and seeds of faith that we hope will let others know about God! So, Allison, how many apples do *I* have?

Allison: One – and there are three parts – just like there is one God but Father, Son and Holy Ghost!

Carolyn: I am glad you understood that!

Allison: [with hands on her hips] I understood it? This was my story!

Ralph: Thank you for that! Sometimes it is hard to understand these things. And ... today we read a story about a man named Nicodemus.

Carolyn: Nicodemus was a leader of the Jewish people.

Ralph: And Nicodemus went during the night to visit Jesus?

Allison: Why did he go at night? Why didn't he go in the daytime?

Carolyn: Because Nicodemus was afraid someone might see him! He wanted to visit Jesus in secret!

Allison: If I could visit Jesus, I would want to see Him anytime I could – even if everyone saw me do it!

Carolyn: [no longer sarcastic – but in a teaching, helping tone of voice] Back then it would have been dangerous for Nicodemus to be seen – none of the other Jewish leaders liked Jesus –

in fact, in the end they were happy to have him die – so Nicodemus was scared they might not like him any more either. So ... Nicodemus went to visit Jesus – out of respect.

Ralph: And that is when Nicodemus and Jesus had a little chat.

Carolyn: It was more than a chat! These are important words. Jesus told Nicodemus that to know God, *really* know God, one had to be born again.

Allison: Born again, how can anyone be born again?

Carolyn: THAT, my little friend [pat Allison on the head – to which Allison will pull her head away] is EXACTLY what Nicodemus wanted to know.

Allison: Oh, that's right – you see, my BIG friend, I actually know what comes next – Mr. English made me ask that question as if I didn't know! Jesus said he meant that to be born again meant to have a new heart, a loving heart, ... a new spirit, a spirit that comes from God – that he didn't actually mean crawling back inside his mother and being born again – how silly is that!

Carolyn: And in the end of this passage, we hear Jesus tell Nicodemus the most important words in the entire Bible – I mean, Nicodemus is the *only* one to hear them – maybe Jesus said them at another time to His disciples – but this is it – and, my pal [Carolyn puts her arm on Allison's shoulder] and sister in faith, these words are not very complicated at all – and I hope you will say them with me:

Allison: Can Mr. English join us?

Carolyn: I thought you were unhappy with him!

Allison: I am not unhappy – it is just that he made me ask you something I already knew! Mr. English, will you join us?

Allison, Carolyn and Ralph: 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. 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.

Carolyn: By the way, Allison, that picture of God that you drew – that is a copy of a painting by Michelangelo!

Allison: Another of Mr. English's ideas!

Carolyn: Well, maybe after worship, you can show it to people!

Allison: I will – but I think we are done now.

Ralph: We are.

Allison: Then I get to say it, I get to say it!

Carolyn: Say what?

Allison: AMEN!