**May 27, 2018**

**Trinity Sunday**

**First Presbyterian Church**

**21 Church Street**

**Pittsford, NY 14534**

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**Holey, Wholly, Holy**

A SERMON FOR TRINITY SUNDAY -  MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

Psalm 29, Isaiah 6:1-8, John 3:1-17

Introduction to the Gospel Narrative

A Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to Jesus under the cloak of darkness.  Darkness symbolizing his secret consultation with one the Pharisees sought to persecute, and darkness symbolizing the great chasms in comprehending Jesus teachings.

John 3:1-17

**1**] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicode'mus, a ruler of the Jews.  [**2**] This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." [**3**] Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."  [**4**] Nicode'mus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"  [**5**] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.  [**6**] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.  [**7**] Do not marvel that I said to you, `You must be born anew.'  [**8**] The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."  [**9**] Nicode'mus said to him, "How can this be?"  [**10**] Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?  [**11**] Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. [**12**] If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?  [**13**] No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.  [**14**] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up,  [**15**] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."  [**16**] For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.  [**17**] For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

 Prayer for illumination

O God, the Three in One, you draw us into your community of love with people across the ages and around the world. By the same Spirit that binds us together speak to us that what we read and ponder may enliven us and stretch us to trust and follow you; through Christ our Savior. Amen

**Holey, Wholly, Holy**

INTRODUCTION

Take another good look at the sermon title.  There are good reasons for sermon titles, especially when you have puns, or word-plays like I do this morning.  I love words.  I love the nuances of words.  Today’s title is intended to go easy on you on this holiday weekend.  The title constitutes the outline to follow, and so, if you are going to let your mind wander into the abyss of holiday events, your grocery list, or wherever else your mind may go…; the title is the take away for today.

I HOLEY

Our first point, our first "Holey" this morning, h-o-l-e-y, is the one that means having holes in it, full of gaps, fissures, cracks, cavities, voids, missing places.

Nicodemus came to Jesus because there were gaps, cavities, chasms, holes in his understanding faith.  Even though he was a faithful Pharisee, who was likely listed as a charter member of the Sanhedrin, he did not have the complete story.  He came to Jesus hoping to hear of some new possibility for his faith.  Jesus’ response confounded him.  It seemed to open up a whole new set of holes for him.  He could not figure out how to fill in the blanks.

And the first thing Nicodemus thought about was not the wonder of being born anew, but his age. He said, "How can a person be renewed this way when he is old? Can he enter into his mother's womb and start the whole process over again?" The Greek word that is used here for “old” is “*geron*.”  We hear it in words like "gerontology".  Nicodemus seemed to think that life had no more possibilities for him.  His faith was unfulfilled – incomplete, which speaks to the fact that we too never seem to grasp the full picture, the complete story even when it is explained to us.  Sometimes our faith is, well, h-o-l-e-y.

II WHOLLY

Given our understanding is often full of holes, it takes us to our second point of how to approach God, and how to receive God. Wholly, this time from the word, "whole," meaning unified. W-h-o-l-l-y.  Jesus tells him that he needs to be wholly reborn from above … that is by the Holy Spirit. Like Nicodemus, we too, from time to time need to take our blinders off and free ourselves from the finite metrics we impose upon ourselves.  Wholly – soley, completely, entirely, totally, without hesitation, disinclination, reservation or reluctance…

III HOLY

Which leads us to our third point.  The real answers, our ultimate fulfillment is found in the infinite one who is HOLY.  Our Old Testament lesson describes how one day while Isaiah is minding his own priestly business in the Temple, he has an indescribable, epiphany-like mystical encounter.  Our lesson described it with graphic verbal imagery.  The hymn we sang after Carrie read from Isaiah was inspired by it.

Isaiah writes about when King Uzziah died,”  Uzziah had ruled Judah for nearly forty years. He had been a good king, as monarchs go, his reign brought peace and prosperity such as the nation had not known since the days of Solomon. His death had thrown the nation into confusion. The sense of strength and security inspired by his presence and rule were now replaced with fear and foreboding. The Jews in Jerusalem sensed the menacing threat posed by the Assyrians, at the time the world’s only superpower. They desperately are in need a word of hope, so God appoints–‘anoints’ is probably the better word–Isaiah to bring that good glad word from God.

With some consternation Isaiah watches a seraph pluck a glowing coal from the altar fire and scurry forward straight for his tender lips, to purify his speech with scorching heat for the work and words of the Lord. A voice cries out: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

Isaiah’s encounter reminds us that whatever the event occurring, the death of King Uzziah, war, terrorism, economic meltdown, ecological crises, volcanic eruptions, senseless shootings in the places that we consider safe, the death of someone we love, the terminal prognosis, the anxiety and depression that afflicts us, or whatever trial we may be experiencing our lives are h-o-l-e-y, filled with imperfection, incomplete comprehension, problems that plague.

We rise above by being born from above – W-h-o-l-l-y – with all our mind and heart and soul and being.  Then we are eager and unafraid to be sent forth with purpose, intention, comprehension, completion into the world that God loved so much that he sent his only begotten Son.

Holey – Wholly – Holy

Let us pray: