

Sermon  
Trinity Sunday  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
May 30, 2021  
William Bradbury

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

In 2009 a group of atheists in the UK decided to announce their version of the good news, so "They paid for large advertisements on London buses, which proclaimed in cheerful colors: "There's probably no God: now stop worrying and enjoy your life." See Anglican Bishop and New Testament scholar Tom Wright's wonderful book, written for ordinary folk like us, called Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is News and What Makes It Good , page 129

**Notice the assumption in this advertisement:** it assumes that god is the sort of being that causes us to worry and needs to be dropped, so we could relax and enjoy life.

We pick up from our culture assumptions about who god is, even if we attend a church that does not teach them. Unfortunately, many Christians have not done **the necessary inner work** to examine these assumptions and thus are hanging on to a god that is distant, abstract, and worrisome.

For example: After a wedding rehearsal one Friday night in 2016, a mother said to her daughter who was a bridesmaid, "Well, imagine that, you're in church and lightening didn't strike and the roof didn't fall in."

**Both mother and daughter laughed, but look at the assumption behind that statement?**

God is expected to punish us when we come back to church after a long absence?

I've heard this kind of thing so many times, I couldn't let it pass, so I said: "**Oh, the God we worship here throws a big party when the Missing in Action show up. That's why Jesus tells the parable of the Prodigal Son!**"

What would it be like if our deepest assumption is that God is so present in us and so in love with us, that the servants are always on stand-by to fire up the grill for a feast in case we show up?

And, of course, Jesus not only taught this good news, but he lived it, welcoming just the sort of people everyone else expects god's lightning will strike.

But the broken and hurting are overwhelmed with two realizations when they are around Jesus: **One: God becomes so real on the inside of their lives and two: their sin and sickness are no match for the God this close and this caring, and who never gives up on them.**

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**This is why on-going faith development is so crucial for all of us!**

**I came across an old quote from Rabbi Gittelsohn, former rabbi of Temple Israel, Boston, who wrote years ago in The Saturday Review: "We live at a time when knowledge is increasing with frightening rapidity . . . we must therefore rethink our ideas of God in a context that includes at once the biological discoveries of Darwin, the physical insight of Einstein, the psychological imperatives of Freud, and who knows what comprehension tomorrow. This does not mean that we have outgrown God or are abandoning Him. Quite the contrary; it is those who insist on constraining God within a conceptual framework that is rapidly becoming meaningless, whom history will adjudge as abandoning Him."**

I love this line, **"constraining God within a conceptual framework that is rapidly becoming meaningless."**

**When was the last time you struggled to update your conceptual framework of God?**

**We must grow beyond the categories we inherited, so we can grow into the vision of Jesus and mystics, old and new, that see through spiritual eyes our ever present union with God.**

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 So the next time you hear someone say, "I no longer believe in god," ask them to describe the god they have stopped believing in.

Usually they'll say something like, "Oh, you know, the angry, judgmental, anti-sex, anti-fun, homophobic, racist, violent old man in the sky god."

Then you can respond: "Oh, I don't believe in that god either!"

But then, of course, we will be called upon to articulate what god we do believe in, and we must be ready to give account of the faith that is in us, which means our faith must be shaped not by dying beliefs, but by living Spirit.

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**This is precisely Nicodemus's problem!** His religious operating system is too old and too slow to receive what Jesus is downloading. **Nicodemus's 30-year-old computer with dial-up internet** simply cannot handle the **streaming reality** Jesus is offering.

Since they didn't have computers in his day, Jesus puts it this way: "You can't put the new wine of the Spirit into the old wineskins of unthinking traditionalism."

Jesus tells Nicodemus he needs a **radical upgrade of consciousness** if he is going to experience the Realm of Spirit in his life.

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can experience the Realm of God without being born from above.... I tell you, no one can enter the Realm of God without being born of water and Spirit."

**Nicodemus then asks the right question, "How can these things be?"**

The Church often gives an institutional answer to this Spiritual question: all you need to do is get your religious ticket punched by attending church every now and then, reciting the creed, taking the sacrament.

**But we can do all these things in our tiny ego without being born from above by Spirit and we can then boast to others, "See how pious I am!!!"**

But Jesus is VERY Clear today: "What is born of human nature is human, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."

And the Apostle Paul is VERY CLEAR today: "So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to human nature, to be dominated by it--for if you live according human nature, you will die.... But all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.... When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God...."

**Nicodemus's choice is simple: he can continue to be a religious person through his natural efforts or he can become a Spiritual person through the grace of New Birth.**

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**Two questions then to ponder this Trinity Sunday: Am I still running the old operating system that gives me a meaningless, distant god?**

**Or am I living out of the** Birth from above where I experience Triune God as "God beyond me", "God beside me", and "God being me"?

The problem facing the Church isn't the atheist who puts cute signs on buses. The problem facing the Church is our addiction to the old wineskin and its sour wine that keep us from drinking the ever-new wine of Spirit.