**Trinity Sunday, May 31, 2015, Isaiah 6:1-8; Ps 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17; Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Our family photo from the early 1960s was taken at our front door, with us lined up, tallest to shortest, dressed in identical blue corduroy dresses. I have three sisters (who I love dearly): Brucie, Eloise, and June. Brucie is a tall artist. Eloise is a coach and bicyclist. June lives in California and has twins. Back when we were growing up, and to today, the differences among those three were/are striking! There is no oneness; other than having the same parents, my three sisters are so different from each other!

Today, we celebrate a very different sort of three: three divine persons who are The One. It is Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We, as Christians, are: "Trinitarian Monotheists," which means that we believe in One God, with three persons. There are some in the world who have been confused about this, thinking that we are saying we have three gods -- no, we have One God and our One God has three robust personalities, three ways of interacting with us. This is difficult to comprehend; it is a holy mystery. Over the centuries, many have attempted to help us appreciate the depth and breadth of the Holy Trinity. St. Patrick explained it using a shamrock: one leaf that has three lobes. 14th Century Julian of Norwich put it this way, **"For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, the Trinity is our endless joy and our bliss.”** The Trinity is all about our getting to know our God, who loves us so.

Nicodemus, a Jewish leader who snuck out at night to converse with Jesus, was a person who struggled to understand the Trinity. In today's Gospel, Jesus helps Nicodemus by explaining, "***no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."*** Nicodemus at first thought that Jesus was speaking of physical birth into the world. But Jesus is speaking about spiritual awakening; our birth into recognizing how much love Jesus has for each of us, our being "***born of water and the Spirit.***" Jesus is trying to get Nicodemus away from his rational, logical, earth-bound way of thinking and into a supernatural way of knowing, being lifted up close to God's love. Jesus helps Nicodemus grasp the magnitude of this love by saying, "***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***" *[the most famous verse in the Bible: John 3:16].* This Gospel passage is near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, where He foretells of His crucifixion and resurrection. So much love! Love that lifts us up:being born from above is what God does in us, if we let Him: all we do is receive, and receive and receive -- like being drenched under a wonderful, gentle, warm waterfall. We don't earn "***being born from above,"*** it happens when we receive the outpouring of love from the Holy Trinity. We know the rest of the story with Nicodemus, as later in John's Gospel Nicodemus was at the foot of the cross helping Joseph of Arimathea with the body of Jesus (19: 39-42). Indeed, he was "***born from above***....***born of water and Spirit***"

When we enter this Church, at either door, there is a holy water font -- which is kept filled at all times by our conscientious altar guild. It is the tradition of our Church to dip one's fingers into the holy water, and to bless oneself with the "**sign of the cross**." Why do we do this? It is a tradition that started way back in the 2nd century, with the making a cross on the forehead -- and the larger gesture began in the 9th Century.When we make the "sign of the cross" we touch our fingers to our forehead and then move our hand to our stomach while saying, "**In the Name of the Father**," and then we move our hand to touch our left shoulder and say "**and of the Son**" and we move our hand to the right shoulder and say "**and of the Holy Spirit**," and then finally we end with touching our chest and saying "**Amen**." This one fluid gesture is a ritual in which we are blessed by the three persons in our One God: the Holy Trinity. Early theologians specified that our foreheads symbolize Heaven, our stomach symbolize the earth, and our shoulders are the place and sign of power. We make a cross on ourselves because the cross is a symbol of Christ's victory over sin and death. When we do the sign of the cross with holy water, we are reminded of our Baptism, our being "***born of water and the Spirit,***" and our entering or leaving a sacred space set apart from the world outside. Holy water is not fresher, purer, or cleaner than other water. Holy Water is blessed by me, your priest, as water that is set apart. The word "holy" means to be set apart, and this water reminds us that we are set apart to do God's work. As we live into our baptisms, as we are blessed by the Holy Trinity, we become "***born from above***."

When you use holy water and do the sign of the cross, experience the seamless oneness, the dynamic flow of love from the Father to the Son, from the Son to the Spirit, from the Spirit to you. The Son, our Savior, shows us the way to the Father, creator; the Spirit guides us in our lives. This outpouring of love is shown in the 14th century Russian icon of the Trinity which is copied on the front of your bulletin today, and in the laminated bookmark for you to take with you in your pews. This icon shows each of the persons of the Trinity, lovingly sitting with each other. And the flow is sensed as you study the icon. It is a visual expression of the nature of God and how we approach God. The Father is on the left, the Son in the middle, and the Holy Spirit is on the right. The Spirit wears blue, the color of the sky, and green, the color of the earth -- all living things are fresh because of the Spirit's touch and breath. The Son unites heaven and earth, and His clothing represent this joining in His being fully human and fully God. The Father, whose hand is raised blessing the Son, wears all colors, including gold; His vision is beyond description. The Son points to the Spirit, and the Spirit touches us. Light shines around the heads of each. The tree in the background is a green tree of life. The table is the invitation to worship: communion. We are invited to enter into the intimacy that flows here.

Below the icon on your bookmarks, is a prayer - a prayer to memorize, to chant, to become part of yourself, "***born from above***." It was written by contemporary Anglican Theologian, N.T. Wright: "**Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, set up your kingdom in our midst. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner. Holy Spirit, breath of the living God, renew me and all the world."** Amen.