

“What Do You Believe?” (Trinity Sunday)
By Rev. James C. Ramsey, Pastor
East Union Presbyterian Church, Cheswick, Pennsylvania

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

Preached: 5/31/15



My sermon is titled “What Do You Believe?” I don’t mean it as a question I am asking you. Rather, I invite you to take the question and ask it to yourself. That way, no one can take exception to your answer! What do you believe about God? ...in your life and in the world? What do we believe?

Today, the Sunday after Pentecost, the church traditionally celebrates Trinity Sunday. It might seem, at first, a rather dry, tired, overly churchy subject. The concept of God as Three in One does not lend itself to modern accessibility. Yet the Trinity has always been a benchmark of Christian and Reformed Faith. What do we believe?



There’s a catchy tune they’ve been playing on Christian radio titled “We Believe” by the Newsboys. You can Google it and get the official music video on YouTube. The words are simple, Trinitarian, and they ring true.

The song starts:

*In this time of desperation
When all we know is doubt and fear
There is only one foundation
We believe, we believe
In this broken generation
When all is dark, You help us see
There is only one salvation
We believe, we believe*

And the chorus:

*We believe in God the Father
We believe in Jesus Christ
We believe in the Holy Spirit
And He's given us new life
We believe in the crucifixion
We believe that He conquered death
We believe in the resurrection
And He's comin' back again, we believe*

I really like the song.



The Prophet Isaiah didn't have Christian radio – but he still heard music!

We can learn from his brush with holiness. He had this spectacular vision and he heard this overwhelming song, the seraphs guarding God's throne singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." He learns that God is in more places than we know!

Isaiah responds in humility and awe. As he prostrates himself, he realizes he is being ordained as a prophet. His sins are blotted out and he is invited to serve God. "Here am I, send me!" He says.

Isaiah met God, and the experience changed his life forever. I was talking to a colleague this week as we do final planning for Deer Lake's Baccalaureate service. We shared about our life of planning worship, studying the scripture, and preparing sermons every week. We agreed that as important as our work is, we cannot give our experience of God to our congregation. We can encourage, inspire, try to create an atmosphere of openness to God, but we hope that people will have their own experience. It's what I hope for my children – that they will have their own experience of God.

Isaiah's holy encounter meant that his way of seeing the world and understanding himself would never be the same. He had to let go of his previous assumptions.

Niels Bohr

The Nobel Prize in 1922

1885-1962

From: Copenhagen, Denmark

○ The study of the atom and of the radiation that originates from the atom.

NI
BO
HE
R
M
O
D
E
L

○ His love for Physics came from his father. Niels discovered the Bohr model which was the theory that electrons travel in precise orbits around the nucleus of an atom. He teamed up with the well-known physicist Albert Einstein to debate quantum theory.

○ His son, Aage Bohr received the Nobel Prize in 1975.

Niels Bohr was a Danish physicist who was a major contributor to quantum physics and nuclear fission. He famously said the universe is "not only stranger than we think, but stranger than we CAN think." He insisted we will not be able to comprehend the nature of the universe until we let go of our supposed logic.

The doctrine of the Trinity sort of says the same thing. God is not only stranger, bigger, greater than we think, but stranger, bigger and greater than we are capable of thinking! The Trinity is not a mathematical formula, or even a quantifiable theological doctrine – we cannot understand it with our logical mind – we only approach understanding through prayer – through living with God, serving God, praising God...only then does the Trinitarian flow begin to come alive in us.

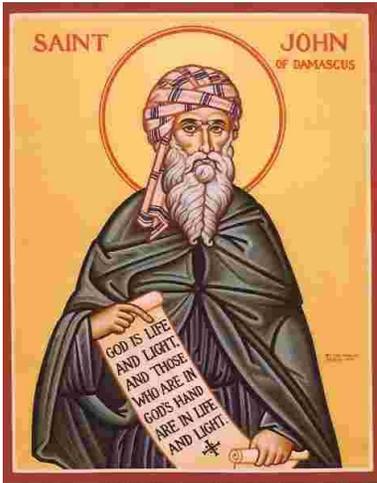
This weekend Fairgrieve Dance Studio is having their Spring Recital. I know East Union has several members who dance at Fairgrieve: Caitlyn Maher, Halle and Paige Mathieson, Macy and Camy Plummer, Desolina Postreich, and my own daughter, Fiona.

Leading up to the recital, dancers and their parents have been receiving almost daily emails from Jenny McGrath, Fairgrieve's director. Jenny signs off every one of her emails with the line, "Let's dance!"



Fiona danced yesterday afternoon. She danced beautifully. I was so proud. Ballet and Jazz and a duet with her friend, Lizzie.

There's something about dance. I've always liked to watch dance. – I told you about a neighbor my family saw several times around Easter, dancing on the road, dancing to music we couldn't hear. But his motions were pleasing and celebrative...almost worshipful – although I don't know his motivation.



John of Damascus was a bearded desert seer of the 8th Century. To Eastern Orthodox Christians he is Saint John of Damascus. He contemplated an appropriate image for the Triune God. He sought a portal into understanding the perplexing doctrine of the Trinity. And then he came upon it – perhaps it was revealed to him through some revelation or he was inspired by something much more earthly.

He coined the term Perichoresis, which in Greek means “the dance of God.” He imagined the Trinity as eternal movement, never still, shifting and swaying, emptying and receiving, delivering and accepting... an endless frolic of love and gift, a community of one, yet three!

How cool to think of God as dancing, moving, hovering, dipping...gracefully carrying out the divine will!

George Cladis is a Greek-American who writes of his experience as a young boy, learning circle dances from his heritage:



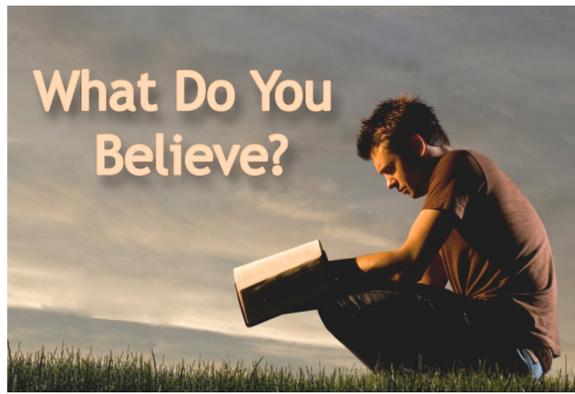
"How to master the steps? The moves? The sway and bob? Jumping in looked risky -- as if one false move would sink a group of flowing Greeks into a pile on the floor.

But jump I did! ... into linked arms clasped strong to the shoulder. I rose with the billowing tide, this way, then that ...

I wasn't to master the steps before the dance; I was to jump in and let the dance carry, show, instruct and ride me on the music to deep delight."



It helped him understand better the ancient wisdom of John of Damascus, and the nature of God as the divine three: Father, Son and Spirit. The dance of God! Perichoresis – the circle dance -- eternal movement!



Have you thought of God in that way before? What do you believe?

Nicodemus had to ask himself that question. He came to Jesus, unprepared for dancing. He tried to think logically, but he realized he had to give up his old way of thinking, if he was going to come along with God. He had to be born from above, Jesus said.

What did Nicodemus believe? What do you believe?

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.

Let's dance!