

Reading from the book of Isaiah six one through seven.

Okay.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe is me, for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for the word of the Lord. Please stand for the reading of the Gospel, a reading from the Gospel of John 16, five through 15.

Okay, come on up here.

So summoning his hold on debts one by one, he said to the first, how much do you owe my masters? He said, 100 measures of oil. He said to him, Take your bill and sit down quickly and write \$50. Then he said to another, and how much do you owe? He said, 100 measures of what? You said to him, take your bill and write \$80. The master commanded the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd and dealing with the own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends of yourself by means of unwrite risk, so that when it fails they may receive you, the internal dwellings. One who is faithful in a very little is so faithful and much, and one who is dishonest a little and also dishonest and much. If then you have not been faithful, the unwritten wealth who will entrust you to the true riches. And if you have not been faithful, that which is another, who will give you that which is your own. No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and this pie the other.

You cannot serve God and money. The Pharisees who were lovers of money heard all these things and they retired. And he to them. You are those who justify yourself before men, but God knows your heart. For who exalted among men is before men is an abomination in the God of sight of God, the word of the Lord.

Thank you, Paxton. Thank you, Elaine. Well, kids, it's time for kids alive. I'd love to pray for you now, Father. We ask your blessing upon the children. We ask that you bless those who teach them and that the word of God finds its way deep into their hearts, that these young people will lead many people into your kingdom, Lord. In Jesus name, amen. All right. God bless you as you go to kids alive.

Good morning, everyone. Well, as Patrick has already said, today is Trinity Sunday, so let's pray. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Lord, speak to us from Your word. Speak to our hearts. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you now and always, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Well, it is Trinity Sunday, and this is a feast in the church calendar that has been celebrated since about the 13th century. And it's celebrated the week after Pentecost. And it's fitting for us to take some time at this point in the church here to marvel at the three in oneness of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity. And it's something to marvel at, indeed. So during Advent and Christmas, if we look back through the church here, during Advent and Christmas, the Son is sent by the Father as God incarnate to show the Father to us. And then after his death and resurrection and ascension, Jesus sends the Spirit so that we can be united with the Son who is one with the Father.

The Trinity is revealed to us in part in the Old Testament and fully revealed to us in the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. So we devote this Sunday in the church year, the Sunday after Pentecost. We devote it to marveling at the astonishing reality that the Creator of the universe has revealed himself to us. I mean, what a remarkable thing that is that the Creator of the universe has revealed himself to us. Anything that we could ever know or will ever know about a holy God, creator of the universe,

including even the little bit of the universe that bears our names. Anything that we will ever truly know about God will have to be by his initiative. We can only know what he reveals. I think of the line from the CS. Lewis book, *Surprised By Joy*, which Lewis likens our knowledge of our Creator to the relationship between a playwright and his literary characters. He says, quote, even if my own philosophy of God were true, how could the initiative lie on my side? If Shakespeare and Hamlet could ever meet, it must be Shakespeare's doing. Hamlet could initiate nothing. Close quote. So we devoted this Sunday in the church year to marveling that the Creator of the universe has chosen to reveal himself to us.

We also devote this Sunday in the church here to marveling at what he has revealed to us about who he is. Namely, he has revealed that God is triune in Himself, father, Son and Holy Spirit. Utter intimacy, as Patrick was saying, utter intimacy distinguishable as three father, Son and Holy Spirit, while being only one, indivisible. This is the core essence of who God is. Before there was even a world, this is who God was. So the triune nature of God is not simply a philosophical abstraction or a purely academic theological exercise. It can feel like that sometimes, right? It may seem like that the more we talk about oneness and threeness and substance and indivisibility, et cetera, et cetera. In fact, a church that our family went to back in Pittsburgh on Trinity Sunday, we would instead of reciting the Nicene Creed or the Apostles Creed, we would recite the Athenacian Creed, which is about 60 some lines. And it's all about the Trinity. It's all about distinguishing between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but remembering the oneness, the inseparability, the indivisibility of it. So the complexity of the Trinity can feel a bit intimidating and beyond our grasp.

But in fact, we believe that God has revealed Himself to us through Scripture. And we believe that by his grace, we can begin to know and to love Him. And to truly know God is to know who God truly is, to know Him as he truly is, as he has revealed Himself in Scripture. And this is to know Him as Trinity, Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit. Three in one God. Now, I recently came across an interesting rephrasing, but faithful rephrasing, I think, of the Nicene Creed found in the Iona Abbey worship book. The Iona Community is a Christian community that's based off of the coast of Scotland, and the members live elsewhere in the world. It's an international ecumenical community, including with faithful Anglicans. On this Trinity Sunday, I'd like to share with you this rephrasing of the Nicene Creed that I recently read from the Iona Community. It goes like this we believe in God above us, maker and sustainer of all life, of sun and moon, of water and earth, of male and female. We believe in God beside us, Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, born of a woman, servant of the poor, tortured and nailed to a tree, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, he died alone and forsaken.

He descended into the earth to the place of death. On the third day, he rose from the tomb. He ascended into heaven to be everywhere, present throughout all ages, and his kingdom will come on earth. We believe in God within us, the Holy Spirit, burning with pentecostal fire, life giving breath of the church spirit of healing and forgiveness, source of all resurrection and of eternal life. Amen. I love this poetic expression of the Creed, and I was struck in particular by the prepositions. I wonder if you picked up on them. God above us, God beside us, God within us. God is above us, beside us, and within us, all at once, three in one father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So on this Trinity Sunday, as we contemplate the God that we worship, as he has been pleased to reveal Himself to us, I'd like to consider each of these prepositions above, beside, and within. But first, let's consider God above us, the Father Almighty. We hear from Yahweh in Isaiah 55. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways. My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than Your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Also in Exodus 15, who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you? Majestic and holiness, awesome inglorious deeds, doing wonders. In Isaiah 40, it is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. I love that imagery. Its inhabitants are like grasshoppers who stretches out the earth like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in. Then, of course, there's Romans 13 of the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. So what does it mean to talk about God being above us? Well, we do not mean it literally, of course. Like as in God is in outer space, reachable by an Atlas Five rocket, like the one that sent the Mars Rover out into space. I think we get a good view of God's above miss his on highness by looking at Isaiah's encounter from the scripture text this morning in

the year that King Yezeiah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraph.

Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him who called. And the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Isaiah, I said, Woe is me, for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts. And then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned. For what is Isaiah's response to the holy presence of the God who is above us? His response is, I don't belong here. I am lost. Isaiah immediately finds that a vision of a holy god shuts the mouth in the presence of a holy God.

Isaiah does not sing a song or start a movement or download. Forgot all of his most nagging when I get to heaven questions. Indeed. All of our most abiding curiosities will be transfigured in the light of gloriously, disorienting holiness, like it was for Isaiah. Isaiah, in the presence of the God who is above us, is quiet. He finds that faith with the holiness of God. He has nothing to say. Isaiah becomes immediately aware of his polluted mouth, which, of course, is an extension of his heart. Right? We know that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. In this remarkable scene, Isaiah's polluted mouth is cleansed by a burning coal in an act of extraordinary love and forgiveness. Think about it. Here, Isaiah experiences the unexpected in the presence of the Holy God, he experiences the unexpected. As it turns out, mercy belongs to the essence of God's holiness as much as justice and purity. Isaiah acknowledges his sin, and he is touched by a coal from the incense altar. He is forgiven and made clean by God by an act of God's grace. Grace sufficient to forgive and cleanse because it originates in the heart of the Holy God.

Here we have a sacramental act. It's an outward visible sign of an invisible grace. It is God's work. It's the incarnation. This sign is the incarnation of holy grace and a foretaste of incarnation to come. So Isaiah clearly has an encounter with a God who is above him. Obviously, to think about God above us is a metaphor. To be above means to sit in a place of honor, praise, worthiness and glory. Scripture often tells us to lift up your eyes. God is greater beyond transcends us and our world. He transcends that which bounds us in time and space and capability. There are heights beyond which we can never explore. God also transcends the best that we can do with all of our individual and collective human potential. God transcends all of our best technology and power. God transcends all human genius and ingenuity. He is above every temporary government, every empire and nation state, above every human authority. Yes, he can and does use these things, but he is always above them. We will spend eternity exploring the heights of the God who is above us. As he is pleased to reveal Himself to us, so we believe in God above us.

Holy, yet merciful, awesome, transcendent, faithful provider, author of the full picture of the whole story. But we also believe in God beside us, in Jesus Christ Emmanuel, god with us. Jesus Christ, the word that creates the universe, stands with us, beside us. Though God is above awesome, glorious, and holy, god decides that he will not keep his distance, but comes to us. He moves into the neighborhood. As Eugene Peterson puts it, one of the most powerful images for me of God being beside us comes just after his resurrection. Remember, Easter, this is something that I sometimes forget. But remember, Jesus does not die and stay dead. Of course we know that, but he also does not die. And then simply ascend to sit at the right hand of the Father, no, Jesus rises from the dead in his human body and then continues to walk the Earth for 40 more days before ascending. And one of the most powerful images for me of Jesus being beside us comes just after his resurrection, in that time before the Ascension, when he meets two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. You will remember this story well.

You'll recall that just after Jesus is crucified and laid in the tomb, his body goes missing. The two of Jesus disciples set out on foot to a village called Emmaus. It's about a seven mile journey, and they are at the absolute lowest point of their lives. They have reached the pit of despair. Listen on in the text from Luke. Luke 24. Now, that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus.

They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, beside them, but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, what are you discussing together as you walk along? They stood still, their faces downcast. They stood still, their faces downcast. Remember, they just lost their friend. Their friend Jesus had just been crucified on the cross. He was their dear friend, their teacher and their brother. But he was also he was also the one in whom they had placed all of their hope. And now, as far as they can tell, he's dead, and their hopes have died with him.

One of the disciples says he, Jesus was a prophet, powerful in word indeed, before God and all the people, the chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. We had hoped he would be this one. These followers of Jesus had reached the lowest point in their lives. Utter despair, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness. The absolute rock bottom. How could they even go on? Now, do any of you know what it feels like to reach a point like that? I know you do. I imagine this is the sort of low that one experiences when their precious child is violently snatched away from them in the blink of an eye. Or the kind of loneliness and despair that could possibly drive someone to take lots of life all at once. Or the kind of helplessness that one might experience as the victim of abuse within the church or family or among loved ones. Or the kind of hopelessness that might characterize the daily experience of someone whose neighborhood and home is ravaged by months of ongoing war and conflict.

Jesus stands beside each and every one of them, each and every one of us, in our despair, in our loneliness, in our helplessness, our hopelessness. Now, of course, these two disciples that are on the road to Emmaus, Jesus the reason Jesus is right there beside them, they do not recognize Him. He is there, present with them at the lowest point of their lives, but they do not recognize that it is Him. He's beside them the whole time, listening compassionately to their sorrows. These two disciples walking along the road on the way to Emmaus are very much on the way in their confusion and sadness about their friends, their teacher, Jesus, about whom they say, we had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel. We had hoped, but of course, he must not have been, because he has been killed, he's dead. So surely he could not have been the one we had hoped. He would have been the one to rescue and redeem us. Of course, they are confiding all of this in Jesus Himself, who has joined them as a road companion. He is on the way with them in their suffering and despair.

And as they walk along, Jesus walks them through the whole of Scripture, illuminating all of it, the whole biblical narrative that they would have known very well, illuminating all of it through the light of his resurrection, from the giving of the impossible a son to Abraham and Sarah, to the parting of the Red Sea, to the feeding of the people of Israel with manna from heaven in the wilderness Elijah and the lighting of the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. And the fourth figure, with that Nebuchadnezzar sees, with Shadrach, Misha and Abundago in the fiery furnace that does not burn, and on and on, Jesus reveals Himself, the resurrected Christ, to be, from the very beginning of time, the center of the whole story. He has been beside us the whole time, all along. Now we may ask the question, was Jesus being beside us just a relatively brief historical episode in Palestine during the first century, where God in Jesus walks beside humanity before he goes back up to being above us? No, in the same way that the eyes of the disciples hearts are opened in the breaking of the bread. Do you remember that?

Their eyes, they've been blinded from recognizing Him until, of course, they begged him to stay and eat. And the eyes of their hearts were open in the breaking of the bread, and they see Him, and they know it's Jesus. And then, remembering their time with Him on the road, they say, we're not our hearts burning within us when he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us. Our Lord promises us that he is truly and authentically beside us in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which we are about to receive. He is truly present with us this morning when we receive Him body and blood in this bread and this wine. And he is beside us in our sufferings, especially in our sufferings, because he knows our sufferings firsthand. He loved all of our sufferings all the way into our graves. He is beside us in our lowest moments, weeping with us, like he wept with Mary in her grief at the death of her brother Lazarus. You remember that? He's beside us, like he was with the thief on the cross that hung beside Jesus cross. Do you remember that?

Jesus Himself, the resurrected Lord, was on the way with these two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He was on the way with them, raising them to new life, lighting a fire in their hearts. And he is on the way with you and me as well. So God, the Father Almighty is above us. God, the Son is ever beside us. And finally, God the Holy Spirit is within us. The life giving Holy Spirit of pentecostal fire, as the Iona Creed says, breath of the Church, the one who reveals truth to us in a world of lies, and the one who intercedes in prayer for us when we cannot find the words to pray or the desire to pray. Anybody know that feeling? A little bit? Isn't that just astonishing? I mean, just take a minute to think about that. But the Holy God we have been talking about this morning, the one who Isaiah sees sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, whose robe filled the temple, that that one. The transcendent allpowerful creator and Sustainer of all things. He is not just out there. He is not just the one to whom we are bold to pray, but that Holy God to whom we pray is also in here praying for us, giving us the voice to pray.

How remarkable is that? In the Gospel reading for this week from John, Jesus goes so far as to say that it's actually good for him, for Jesus to go, so that he can send the Holy Spirit quote, for I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go. For if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. God is as much within us as the very breath we are breathing. In fact, the word that we have been given for the Holy Spirit in Scripture is the word for breath. The creation scene we see in Genesis two offers us an image of a creator God who comes down into the mud, intimately molding, like pottery, intimately molding Adam out of the dust of the earth and then lovingly breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. The Holy Spirit is the giver of life. As we say in the Nice and Creed, the Spirit is always associated with the giving of life. Think about the Spirit hovering over the face of the deep in the beginning. Think about the Spirit breathing into Adam to give him life.

The Spirit mercifully overshadowing Mary in the conception of Christ. If all tells us that by the Holy Spirit, Christ was raised from the dead and the Spirit breathes life into the Church at Pentecost, all vitality and vibrancy of the Church is by God's gift of the Spirit. It is all a gift. So God's breath is the source of the life of all of creation. We know that the final stanza of the Apostles Creed, which we will recite in just a few moments, says, I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen. This last stanza of the Creed, I don't know if you ever thought about this, but it's not meant to just be a catch all for all. The doctrinal assertions that were left to the very end to declare, oh yeah, let's get all these things in here really quickly. Church resurrection, all that no, all that follows. I believe in the Holy Spirit, all of those things that follow is the work of and the evidence for the Holy Spirit. It is because of the Holy Spirit that we have a church.

It is because of the Holy Spirit that there is a communion of saints both here among us, here across space and here across time with all those who have gone before us. And it will be by the Spirit that we will have the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen. This is all the work and the evidence of the Spirit, the Spirit, the work of the Spirit that is within us, the breath of God. Jesus says, I've come to give you life in all of its fullness, and this life comes through the giver of life, the Spirit within us. So on this Trinity Sunday, we marvel at the three in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who is above us, beside us and within us. Not only above us, not only beside us, not only within us. God is not simply a lofty, aloof tyrannical commander God who broods over us. Similarly, God is not only our familiar friend, teacher and companion on the way. And God is not merely Spirit, breath of life and light that reveals truth. God is simultaneously above and beside and within the Trinity. Holy, holy, holy.

Three in one distinguishable in three, but indivisible sharing, as Patrick said, unparalleled intimacy and an exchange of love between the three persons of God who is love itself and making us all of us, in his image. He has created us for this intimacy and calls us into the love of the Trinity if we'll accept. In closing, let's recall the scene of Jesus after his death and resurrection in the upper room with his disciples. This is from John 20 Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, peace be with you. Listen to this as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And whining he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld so. Church we are the Body of Christ who is beside us. As the Father who is above us, sent him. He sends us into the world to stand beside our neighbors and even our enemies, as the Body of Christ bringing hope to the world's despair and loneliness and helplessness and hopelessness.

And he breathes into us the Spirit, that we may carry the giver of life into the world, that the world may have life and have it to the full. May we receive it, church, and carry it and go faithfully and wholeheartedly wherever we are sent. In the holy name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.