

“The Mystery of God”

Rev. Debra Given, the Presbyterian Church in Leonia
May 31, 2015 Trinity Sunday, Year B

Isaiah 6:1-8 John 3:1-10

Who do you think Jesus is? And whatever you believe about him, how did you get there? How did you come to believe it?

In the story from John that Nancy read this morning, Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, in the dark. He didn't ask Jesus any questions. He was not trying to trick him into saying something that could get him in trouble with the religious leaders, as other people were doing. He just said, “Rabbi, (or teacher), we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs you do apart from the presence of God.”

Nicodemus thought he knew who Jesus was, because of the signs and miracles Jesus performed. But right before this it says that Jesus didn't trust himself to anyone who believed based on signs (2:23-25). You can always find a sign to believe anything. And then you can find another sign to believe something else. Real faith has to be deeper than signs. So Jesus said, “No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above.”

What is that supposed to mean? Nicodemus had absolutely no clue. Jesus was shaking up everything Nicodemus thought he understood. So Jesus went on to say, “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

If you can sense God's spirit at work on the earth, then you will also recognize God in Jesus. It's not about knowing the right things, or thinking the right way. And it's not about morality, or behaving the right way. It's about being able to recognize God's grace and love. It's something you feel by the spirit, as the reggae singer Jimmy Cliff used to sing, “Who feels it, knows it.” When you are born of the spirit, you see and experience the world, not just in terms of your own desires and pleasures, but from God's perspective, through the spirit.

As I mentioned to the children earlier, today is Trinity Sunday. The word “Trinity” never appears in the Bible, but our scripture lessons for today bring us encounters with God, with Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit. In the passage that Suzanne read this morning, Isaiah was shaken by an encounter with God. It was an overwhelming vision of God in the temple. God was so vast and great, that just the hem of his robe filled the entire temple. In the face of God's holiness and glory, Isaiah was struck with his own inadequacy and sin. Yet God cleansed him and gave an invitation, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” This was not a command. Isaiah had the freedom to say “yes,” or “no” to God. But he rose to the challenge and volunteered, “Here I am, send me.”

And Nancy read of Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus thought he understood Jesus' relationship to God. But Jesus challenged Nicodemus to encounter the Holy Spirit, which blows through people's lives like the wind and gives birth to new life in faith.

So this morning we offer you your own opportunity to encounter God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit through a guided meditation. A guided meditation is a form of prayer, where we don't just think about God, but we interact with God through entering a story from the Bible or interacting with characters in it. We imagine ourselves as participants in the story, acting and responding to people or situations as they arise in our imaginations.

You start by getting yourself into a comfortable position, where you don't need to move or squirm. It may help if you sit up straight with your feet on the floor. It may help to open your hands on your lap, or not, but give it a try. And it usually always helps to close your eyes. Now take a few slow deep breaths. Pay attention to your breath, coming in and going out.

Now imagine that you are going to meet Jesus secretly, somewhere where no one will see you. You know where he is and now imagine yourself going there.

You arrive. What do you notice? What does the place look like?

If you haven't seen Jesus yet, he appears and sits down, and invites you to sit down too.

You think you know who he is, but anything can happen.

Do you have something to say to Jesus? (a statement or question?)

Does he say anything to you?

If there's a conversation, let it develop.

You realize that God and the Holy Spirit are there too.

What do you notice?

God says, "Who will go for us, and whom shall I send?"

How do you feel about that question?

However you feel, you find yourself volunteering.

What do you say or do?

It's time to leave. The Holy Spirit takes you outside.

Where are you going?

What is the spirit showing you to do?

What happens next?

You step back and thank God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit for what you have just seen. They may answer back.

And here's a thought to ponder: Did God show something to you in this meditation that you need to take seriously or remember? What will you do to remember it?

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Creator, Christ and Spirit. Amen.

