

“Revealed in Relationship”
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Presbyterian Church in Leonia
June 12, 2022- Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Romans 5:1-5

I am starting to suspect that God might be an introvert.

I suspect it's good practice to explore the parts of God that are radically ***other*** from what you know. If the word *kadosh* or holy means set apart, when we say “holy, holy, holy,” that reverence and awe speaks something about how ***set apart*** or ***other*** God is from us.

I am starting to suspect that God might be an introvert; most of the time I experience life as an extrovert. I see myself as extraverted not because I have natural social grace or the ease that popular kids seem to have; if you have known me much at all, you've probably noticed that I have many awkward edges. But at the end of the day, I tend to get energized from being around a group of people, more than exhausted. Don't get me wrong: I still love my Sunday afternoon naps if I can get a chance to do so. But I can't tell you the number of times I have dragged myself to a church event I was leading, not wanting to leave the coziness of home, only to come back completely abuzz and full of life, energy drawn from the people I saw at church and what happened when I was with them. By nature, I look for where I can connect with and build community. Coffee hour does not scare me, like it scares some.

On the other hand, I am married to an introvert. An example of her nature I will share happened a few weeks ago. I dropped Chris and Kai off for Kai's end-of-the-year concert, while I parked the car; when I came back to join Chris with the other parents who were waiting for doors to open so they could get the good seats, I saw Chris was standing next to our good friend, Dave. Now this is someone who has had us over to his home, whose daughter is good friends with our daughter... we kind of orbit one another in the same social group and activities in town. But instead of talking to each other, Chris was looking at her phone, and Dave was staring into space while his youngest child twirled around him. As I slipped into line with them, I said, sarcastically, “Wow, Dave, it looks like Chris has been great company to you!” Dave, who is also an introvert, cheerfully replied, “The best! I hate idle chit-chat. I could stand silently beside Chris all day!” So then, of course, I managed to disrupt their easy silence with mindless chatter until the doors to the concert opened.

In her book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, the author Susan Cain describes introverts as “ones who listen more than they talk, think before they speak”... they are often “creative or intuitive. They dream vividly, and can often recall their dreams the next day. They love music, nature, art, physical beauty. They feel exceptionally strong emotions--sometimes acute bouts of joy, but also sorrow, melancholy, and fear. [Introverted]

people also process information about their environments--both physical and emotional--unusually deeply.”

Susan Cain gives the example of Rosa Parks as an introvert. In her obituaries, people recalled her as “soft-spoken, sweet, and small in nature”... “timid and shy” but “with quiet fortitude” and “the courage of a lion.” This woman “uttered a single word that ignited one of the most important civil rights protests of the twentieth century, one word that helps America find its better self. The word is ‘No.’”

Introverts, I have noticed, often take a long time to answer– but when they finally do answer, you’d better listen, because what they come up with is usually more perceptive and well-thought out than those of us who think out loud. In committee meetings at the church, I sometimes pause the meeting and ask “would anyone who hasn’t said anything yet like to jump in?” because I know that for an introvert, jumping into a fast-moving conversation may not feel worth it unless someone is willing to invite them to speak. Extroverts are great at describing what is. Introverts are great at articulating “what if.”

When I think about how quiet God is; when I think about how long it is before I hear God speak to me or answer me; when I think about how God chose to send messages to us in writing instead of showing up, face-to-face with us; when I think about the wonderful majesty of God’s creative action in the world, it makes sense to me: God must be an introvert.

I think about the loneliness of Queen Elizabeth, as she attended her own husband’s funeral. Due to COVID restrictions, the crowd at St. George’s Chapel at Windsor was limited to just 30 for the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip’s funeral. And the camera showed his Queen sitting all in black, with her head bowed, completely alone. The image struck a resonant chord with the world– not only because we felt empathy for the mourning queen, but also because it captured the isolation and grief we have all been feeling during the pandemic. But another thing many people noticed about that picture was the strength and power in her aloneness. We know: she’s the queen! Whether due to the royal need for attendants, the appropriateness of sitting with family, or the basic needs for assistance at her very senior age, she could have had any number of people sitting at her side. Instead, she chose quiet isolation, knowing the message it would send to her country and to the world: you are not alone in your state of being alone.

God enters that sort of loneliness as well, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus hangs alone on the cross, feeling abandoned and defeated, crying out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Even though, I imagine, it must have been the utterly loneliest moment in Jesus’ life, it also is a moment in which Jesus is most able to connect with anyone who has felt the pain of betrayal, oppression, suffering... or death. When we are at our loneliest point, we can remember that we are never quite alone.

I suspect God is an introvert, showing that quiet power even in God’s aloneness. When the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep– that’s when God’s amazing work of creation began. But the truth is, introverts are not simply those who prefer to

be alone. Introverts often have the closest and deepest connections with their friends; they just bypass the multitude of casual acquaintances available to them, in favor of forming relationships that really matter.

And God is not as alone as we may assume God to be. Instead of being part of the Pantheon of gods offered by Greek religion, or any number of religions, God comes to us in just three beings, and together, they make just one. Clear as mud, right?

The Bible never mentions the word “Trinity;” While the bible in many places mentions all three persons of the Trinity-- God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit-- it doesn’t mention the Trinity as an established “thing.” It was not until the early 3rd century that theologians started using the word “Trinity,” and in 325 it became part of a creedal statement at the Council of Nicea.

Today, in the liturgical calendar we share with Christians all over the world, we celebrate Trinity Sunday. Most Christians call this Trinity Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here at Presbyterian Church in Leonia we are also likely to hear Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit or Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. All are our human attempts at naming an understanding of one God who exists not just in one being, but in relationship.

In Proverbs, we discover an understanding that God was not as alone as we imagine God to be. Here we find a co-worker with God, and her name is Wisdom– or, as the Greek translation calls her: Sophia. She was there, with God, before the beginning of the earth. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, Sophia was brought forth; when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, “Then” –Sophia Wisdom says– “I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

Delighting in the human race doesn’t sound much like something an introvert would do. People are noisy. People are messy. People ask God for a lot of things. People sometimes disappoint. In fact, if we are honest, people often disappoint.

Therefore, I can see how precious, how risky, it was for God to reach out and make people like us. Introverts can be highly sensitive to the environment, tuned to every bit of stimuli. So, it could have been enough for God to sit among the rocks and the trees. To listen to birds chirp and ants march. To watch the roll of the sea, second by second, and the evolution of a mountain, century by century. But instead of– or in addition to– all that, *God chose us.*

I can’t tell you with any certainty if God is actually an introvert or an extrovert. I do like the idea of exploring that which feels radically ***other*** to us as a way of knowing who God is. I believe that through Jesus, through putting on human skin and becoming one of us, God also took on that task of exploring what felt radically ***other*** to God. Traveling with a band of disciples; having conversations with tax collectors, Pharisees, *strangers*... Please! If God is an

introvert, then through Jesus, God *really* stepped out of the comfort zone. No wonder before or after significant moments in his ministry, Jesus was always taking intentional time in isolation in the wilderness, on a boat, in a garden.

There are all kinds of flawed examples to explain who or what the Trinity is to us. Some examples over history are so flawed that the church leaders even declared them heresies. I'm not going to give you a wordy doctrine or theological statement on how to understand the Trinity. Instead, I am going to invite you to discover holiness by stepping into what feels radically other to you. If you are most likely to find God when you are alone in the quiet, maybe watching a sunset, then find a way to also know the threeness of God, revealed in relationship: find God through the messy experience of people. Feed the hungry at Family Promise. Serve on a committee. Do so with the intention of looking for God. If you are most likely to find God while you are connecting with other people, try taking some time to look for the oneness of God— or let God look for you— while sitting in quiet solitude. That could mean you tend the garden at church, or take time to listen more than you talk, or simply try to be still, in quiet meditation.

All this doesn't mean you need to give up the ways you know God best. But by stretching yourself to love God in a new way, you may also find ways of feeling loved by God in new ways.

One in three. Three in one. What will your relationship with God reveal?