

Message for June 7, 2009 (Trinity Sunday)

“Whom Shall I Send?”

You're sitting in Starbucks, enjoying a cup of coffee, and suddenly you get this feeling that you should look over at the other table. Being the type who follows those messages in your head, you do just that. The person sitting at that table smiles, and you smile back (because you are, after all, a friendly person!). “Good coffee,” says he. And for some reason, it pops into your head to say, “Yeah – this is almost as good as the fair trade coffee I've had at my church.” “No fooling?” your new friend says. “What's Fair Trade mean?” And you get the chance to fill this person in on the whole notion of Fair Trade goods, and the fact that your church sells Fair Trade coffee and chocolate for the good of God's wonderful world and its people. Odds are, he will ask you what church you go to, and suddenly, you are alive with welcome, and invite him to pop in some Sunday at 10:30 – where you can buy him a great cup of coffee.

In the five minutes this conversation may have taken, you've just witnessed about your faith – and you've served as God's messenger to the waiting world. It didn't put anyone off or offend – it was casual conversation that came up quite naturally, and only God knows how it will ultimately end up. Guess what? The Holy Spirit used you as the conduit to connect your caffeine-stoked friend with a loving, generous God. In that five minutes, YOU were the member of the Trinity named Spirit...partners with God the Father, and Jesus the Savior. You did your share and you didn't even know it. Getting our beliefs out into the world should be this easy...we hear it today in our Scripture reading.

God asks of Isaiah, “Whom shall I send?” And the response is, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.” Human, sin-filled (but newly forgiven) Isaiah answers the call to serve. Just like that, he's enlisted and put to work.

Last week, we began this discussion about what the Spirit could do and how it operates as we celebrated Pentecost – today, we need to add two more players to this lineup. Trinity Sunday honors the Triune God – and tradition tells us that the Trinity with a capital “T” is the “Big Three” of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But, the longer I live in my own little faith world, the more I believe the members of the Trinity work more like a well-trained team. God and Jesus are the stationary goal-tenders; steadfast, reliable, ready to catch anything and able to see big picture of who and what God is out in the field. In my mind, they truly are out there in that “other” world, keeping watch over what we do with our lives – intercepting as necessary to keep us where we need to be on our way to becoming whole Christians.

But the Spirit member of the Trinity– the part that dodges in and out of our lives, wearing many uniforms, playing any position on lots of teams – is the entity that enlists

us for assists during the game, and turns us into its alter-ego, doing Spirit-like work on behalf of God's love. The rich tradition of answering the call, "Whom shall I send?" began long ago, with many Old Testament prophets before Jesus even appeared on the scene. God's Spirit was there, too - timeless and crafty – infiltrating the souls of Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptizer and others, who managed to listen to what God was telling them to do and follow the voice of the Spirit, and do God's will. "Here I am Lord – send me."

Later in the Gospels, we learn that the disciples needed a nudge by the Spirit after Jesus' resurrection, to spark their desire and conviction to serve as talent scouts for God's new teams. They were a little worried about how to do it "right" – they probably realized Jesus taught them what they needed to know, but they were afraid to trust that they *already knew* how to recruit others as they brought God to the world outside the upper room. They needed tongues of fire and an opportunity to witness the Spirit at work to give them the jump-start required to create Christianity.

I have a feeling we are no different than those hesitant, insecure disciples. At times, it feels like we put too much emphasis on how we should serve God, and we make it more complicated than it really is...we don't listen to the voice encouraging us to *do something*, just because. To be the Spirit's ally, to be part of the Trinity Team, doesn't necessarily require miracles and it doesn't mean we have to produce grand displays. Often, the smallest gesture leaves the greatest impression about God's way in our lives; a few friendly sentences spoken in a coffee shop can change the world for one person. Suddenly, a community that shares a few basic beliefs or offers a friendly environment is out there for him – there's a place to go where one might not feel so alone or forgotten – or, where something as simple as enjoying a decent cup of Joe can bring folks together, just because it feels good.

Every time we pay attention to that voice, and we allow our faith to guide what we do – to help someone in trouble, or listen to a grieving stranger – the Spirit shines through our actions, and God's presence alive in us flows into the other person...some intangible thing is exchanged. We may not be able to recognize it at the time, but it's there – that seed has been planted, and the Spirit takes over. You just never know when - or how – you will be an instrument of God's Spirit – part of the Trinity Team. The beauty of how it works is that it can be spontaneous or carefully planned – there is no one right way to answer, "Here I am."

For us, in our church family, purposeful opportunities are appearing to encourage each of us to be part of the answer to the question, "Whom shall I send?" We're reaching out because it's time to put our love and belief in God into action.

By now, you've seen the banner and you know that each night this week, our church will open its doors to a community of children and their families as we present our

Vacation Bible School. A few of our own children (kids and grandkids) will participate and we're thankful for their presence, but this is also one great way to serve as that conduit for the Spirit to bring people to God in a non-threatening way.

The children who come to Vacation Bible School this year will get a chance to learn church camp songs and Bible stories. They will create costumes and new faces with makeup, and learn how to be messengers or servants, how to bring smiles to the lonely, how to tell stories with pantomime, and heal with laughter.

This is Christian Clowning, (very different from Circus Clowning) and when presented with God at the center of it all, it's a very pure way the Spirit can flow in and out of their hearts. Much of what Christian clowns can do in worship mirrors what Jesus did with the multitudes – the message is the same, but the clothes are just a little more colorful.

So when God asks, "Whom shall I send?" our answer can sometimes be surprising...children in funny clothes can share God's stories with their families...the seeds can be planted...God's Spirit will shine through them. And this is just the beginning! There's no end to how we can let that Spirit put us to work...

Preacher Kevin Miller, in a sermon entitled, "Getting to Know Your God" puts it nicely. Here is his story...

Perhaps the best analogy for the Trinity is a time when you experienced a community of love. Maybe it happened when you were part of a family when it was at its most healthy and loving. A sports team when people stopped worrying about their own egos. A support group where you felt cared for in spite of your brokenness. A music group when you finally got lost in the music. To experience the Trinity is to experience a community of love.

So when I think of analogies of the Trinity, I think of Mike Yearley's apartment. When I came to Wheaton, I moved 700 miles from family. Back then, there was no email, no instant messages, no cell phone. My college roommate hung out by himself. My first winter, it snowed 90 inches. I felt like I was living in the Arctic. So I was lonely and, literally, out in the cold.

Then a senior guy named Mike Yearley invited me to his apartment for dinner and a Bible study. I got there, and the first thing I noticed was that his apartment had real walls made out of dry wall, not cinder blocks painted over too many times.

His wife, Lin, was cooking a home-cooked meal—I could smell it as soon as I walked in the door—and it tasted way better than anything from the college cafeteria. There were other people there, too—a guy named Dave, and another

named Dan, who were upperclassmen and popular. They would never have spent time with me, or even known who I was, but because I'd been invited in to Mike's apartment, they talked with me. We all talked and laughed and played games and listened to music and drank coffee and hung out till super late. And as I walked home with Dan, I thought: Wow. No one's got a huge, bloated ego. They just care about each other.

That apartment became my home and my sanity. Whenever I had a question or problem about dating, I would head to Mike's apartment. Whenever I had a question or problem about my spiritual life, I would head to Mike's apartment. At the time, I was trying to live my Christian life in a legalistic way, in my own power, which is a really stinky way to do it. But I didn't know any other way.

So Mike and Dan began teaching me how to live by the power of the Holy Spirit within. What I found in Mike's apartment was this community of love. What I felt there was a little picture of what Jesus talked about when he said: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." To be a Christian is to get an invitation to Mike's apartment. To be a Christian is to be invited into the Community of Love we call the Trinity. In the Trinity, you never find one Person who's grumpy. Never find a Person who is taking love but not giving it out. No one's critical or cynical or jaded.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit live in absolute unity of love. The Father glorifies the Son. The Son gives glory to the Father. The Spirit knows the thoughts of God and prays to God for our sake. The Father has all authority, yet he gives that authority to the Son, and the Spirit speaks on God's authority. Meanwhile, the Son lives in absolute obedience to the Father, for the Son does only what he sees the Father doing. And the Spirit is sent by the Father in the name of Jesus.

Do you see that in the Trinity there's no jealousy, no politics, no power plays? The reason we can't find many good analogies for the Trinity is that we constantly live in such broken relationships that it's hard for us to imagine a Community in which there's constant joy and creativity and each Person pours himself out for the others. It sounds crazy, but I think it would be theologically accurate to say: "God is a party, and you're invited."

Or, I could say, God is the Coach and we're part of the Winning Team. If each of us is willing to allow the Spirit of the Trinity to move within, there is no limit to what we can accomplish in God's name. Living a Spirit-guided life changes everything, and while it

can be a little scary to step out there and make a play now and then, once we accept that we are partners and players in the process, it really becomes more like a celebration of our belief in, and our bond with, God, Jesus and that amazing Spirit. All the parts of the Trinity have the potential to work together in us for the good of the team – when God asks, “Whom shall I send?” all we have to do is answer, “Here I am, Coach . Send me in.” Amen.