

# TRINITY SUNDAY

*Year B*

*Erica Andersen is a senior residential student at Nashotah House Theological Seminary and is an aspirant to the priesthood in the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas. She serves as seminarian at Trinity Episcopal Church, Waunatosa, Wisconsin. She previously studied English literature, classics, and Montessori education. For many years she was a homeschooling parent and community volunteer. Her hobbies include language learning, reading, hiking, gardening, and crochet. She is passionate about teaching God's word to people of all ages. Erica and her husband Tim have three children.*

## Isaiah 6:1-8

**6** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. **2** Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. **3** And one called to another and said,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

**4** The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. **5** And I said, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

**6** Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. **7** The seraph touched my mouth with it and said, “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” **8** Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

## Commentary from Erica Andersen

When reading the books of prophecy in the Old Testament, it is important to approach them as poetry rather than as history or journalism. Prophecy stretches our hearts and imaginations, offering glimpses of God's glory and of a deeper reality transcending what we normally experience with our senses.

In this passage, Isaiah describes God, who is so glorious that the hem of God's robe fills the temple. He describes wondrous heavenly beings, seraphs, who sing to God, using words that inspired the first part of the Sanctus hymn that we sing during the Eucharist. (Sanctus means “holy” in Latin.) This description of seraphs (or seraphim as they are also called) is unique to Isaiah.

Isaiah is overwhelmed by this experience of God's glory and majesty, and he feels unworthy to have seen such an incredible sight, but a seraph brings him a coal that takes away his sin and guilt. Fire in the Bible is often a symbol of purification. Following this purification, Isaiah hears God's voice and responds to God's call.

## Discussion Questions

Isaiah describes God's greatness and magnificent size, but he does not describe anything specific about God's appearance or his face. Why do you think this is?

Try to imagine the seraphs that Isaiah describes. Although angels seem to be different types of heavenly beings from seraphs, does this change your idea of what angels might look like?

## Psalm 29

- <sup>1</sup> Ascribe to the Lord, you gods, \*  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- <sup>2</sup> Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his Name; \*  
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
- <sup>3</sup> The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;  
the God of glory thunders; \*  
the Lord is upon the mighty waters.
- <sup>4</sup> The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice; \*  
the voice of the Lord is a voice of splendor.
- <sup>5</sup> The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; \*  
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
- <sup>6</sup> He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, \*  
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.
- <sup>7</sup> The voice of the Lord splits the flames of fire;  
the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; \*  
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- <sup>8</sup> The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe \*  
and strips the forests bare.
- <sup>9</sup> And in the temple of the Lord \*  
all are crying, "Glory!"
- <sup>10</sup> The Lord sits enthroned above the flood; \*  
the Lord sits enthroned as King for evermore.
- <sup>11</sup> The Lord shall give strength to his people; \*  
the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

### Commentary from Erica Andersen

Today's psalm is one of praise, focusing on God's glory, magnificence, and power. The psalmist describes the power of God's voice, a theme that can be found throughout scripture. In Genesis 1, God creates the world through speech. Isaiah hears God's voice in today's Old Testament passage. Peter, James, and John hear God's voice in the Transfiguration accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

In today's psalm, God's voice has power to break the cedar trees, make mountains skip, split flames of fire, shake the wilderness, and make oak trees writhe. God's power is awe-inspiring, and it is comforting to know that nothing in the world is stronger or more powerful than God.

### Discussion Questions

What image in this psalm do you find the most compelling?

What other episodes in scripture can you think of that involve God's voice? How do they compare with Psalm 29 and the episodes mentioned above?

## Romans 8:12-17

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### Commentary from Erica Andersen

In this segment from Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul mentions Father, Son, and Spirit, making this a fitting passage for Trinity Sunday. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, we are invited into the life of the Holy Trinity.

Paul writes about dying to sin so that we can have new life in Christ. In a culture that places so much value on the individual, it may be challenging to think of being led by the Holy Spirit as liberative. Paul is clear that sin, or the worship of anything that is not God, such as money, fame, or pleasure, is a form of slavery. These material things will never satisfy us; seeking after them becomes an addiction.

Because of the work of Christ, we can be restored to our original purpose, to live in unity with God, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. This is not work that we do ourselves but work that the Spirit does within us, with our consent. Even our prayers are prompted by the work of the Holy Spirit. Freedom is dying to sin and living an abundant life in Christ, so that we grow more unified with the Holy Trinity and with one another, becoming the human beings that God created us to be.

### Discussion Questions

Can you think of instances in your life when surrendering to God has been a liberating experience?

## John 3:1-17

<sup>3</sup> Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”

<sup>11</sup> “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup> “For 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.

<sup>17</sup> “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

### Commentary from Erica Andersen

In today’s Gospel passage, as in the epistle, we again have a description of how the Trinity works, of God sending the Son into the world to save it, of human beings needing to be born of the Spirit in order to enter God’s kingdom. God is one, but somehow God is also Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus seeking answers to difficult questions. He knows that Jesus comes from God, but he is earnestly struggling to understand Jesus’ teachings intellectually. Jesus patiently addresses his many questions. Many Christians struggle with the concept of the Trinity, while many other Christians seem content to accept that God is more complex than our brains can grasp and live with the mystery. Whatever our struggles or questions are, we can feel confident and safe that we can bring them to God in prayer.

John 3:14-15 refers to a fascinating story in Numbers, in which God makes a way for the Hebrew people to be saved from a plague of venomous snakes by looking upon a bronze serpent. Similarly, Jesus has come to offer healing and redemption to a broken and rebellious world when we raise our eyes to him. John 3:16-17 are two of the most comforting verses not only in the Gospel of John but in the entire Bible. They proclaim that God loves God’s creation and is working to save it.

### Discussion Questions

What difficult theological questions do you want to bring to Jesus in prayer?

What are some concrete ways that your church community can lovingly show those around you that God sent the Son into the world in order to save it, not to condemn it?