

Will Harrison

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Preacher: Fr. Will Harrison

[0:00] Amen. In the name of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen. Well, good morning to you all. I'm going to start talking about this wonderful Sunday by referring to last fall. Last fall was our first fall in the Northeast as a family, and my mother and grandmother came up to spend about a month with us.

We drove through New England. We went to Boston. We did Boston in the fall. It was wonderful. And we drove all the way through Vermont and then back through the Adirondacks. It was gorgeous.

It was absolutely amazing. And constantly on that trip, my mother and grandmother would say to each other, Oh, Cheryl, look over here. Look at this tree. And then my mother would say to my grandmother, Laverne, look at this tree.

They would constantly, as we were driving. Now, that can get a little bit annoying if you're the one driving. But it expressed a true feeling that they were having.

[1:24] The beauty was just indescribable as we drove through there. I had a similar experience driving in Alaska on one particular stretch of the Richardson Highway, driving from a small town called Glenallen to another small town called Palmer.

It is an absolutely gorgeous drive. Glaciers and mountains, trees and wildlife. It's just beautiful. Have you ever had a similar experience in your life? Seen something so absolutely beautiful, so breathtaking or captivating that you stand in awe?

Well, it's almost impossible to communicate what that is like. Impossible to communicate that feeling and that sense. We even have a word in English to describe what that is because it's indescribable.

The word is ineffable. Something so great, so amazing that it is beyond description. Something too wonderful.

[2:33] Well, when you had that experience, how did you respond to it? Standing in awe is our typical state, but how did you respond?

Our texts today talk about this. They talk about how we respond to encountering what we can't comprehend, what we can't describe.

In our Old Testament and New Testament readings, we see encounters in God's throne room. And the psalm is a response to God's actions in the world.

And in the gospel, Jesus says to us, There are things that you can't get. You can't bear them now. You can't understand them. But he still offers us instruction.

In all of these, we see that the response to the ineffable, to the incomprehensible, is that we are to worship God and to learn truth.

[3:41] It's a fitting lesson for today, being Trinity Sunday, when we honor and celebrate a truth, a belief, an understanding that we really cannot understand or express.

Preachers consistently attempt to do this throughout history without success. And I'm not even going to try today. But there are all sorts of ideas for this.

Talk to Rachel, my wife, after church, if you want to hear some of the incredible ones that we have heard in our time, and express your own. But the point of today is that we celebrate a truth.

We celebrate a truth that we cannot understand, let alone accurately describe. And we, as in our readings, are to worship and learn.

So let's look at our text for today. In Isaiah, we see the prophet in the throne room. He has this vision of God.

[4:54] And this vision is amazing. There's the train of God's robe filling the throne room. Now, if you have seen some of the royal weddings on TV recently, the brides have had significant trains.

But I do remember seeing on TV, much later, Princess Diana's wedding in England. That was a very long wedding train.

That was incredibly long. Yet it still did not fill the room that they were in. The train of any sort of robe or gown is meant to display the dignity and honor of the person.

The more dignity, the more honor the person has, the larger the train is, the part that is allowed to drag on the ground and be carried. God's train fills the temple.

It fills this whole place with glory. How large and magnificent is just the hem of God's robe to do that?

[6:07] And then Isaiah talks about these angels, these seraphim. And all he can say is, they're flying and they've got six wings and they sing. That's not a really good description.

I don't know if any of you have ever been involved in a police report or any sort of legal matter where they want you to be very specific and say, well, what did this look like?

This would not cut it in any sort of way. This is not a good description. And then Isaiah says, well, when people were speaking or when these angels spoke, everything shook.

Well, that's an impressive thing again. But that's not really descriptive. It doesn't really talk about it a lot.

But there is a lot of smoke and that might be why things aren't as descriptive there. There is the whole place filled with smoke. And so he may be having a little bit of trouble seeing what's going on.

[7:16] But in the midst of all of this, this sound, this glory, this just unbelievable different world, we see what the angels do.

In response to all of this, these angels worship. Look again at verse 3 in Isaiah. And one called to another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. That worship is the response to everything that is going on. And what does Isaiah say at this point?

He recognizes something. He says, woe is me. One version says, I'm undone. I'm pulled apart. I'm lost.

But he also learns something else rather amazing. The angel comes to him and touches his lips with a coal and says, your guilt has been taken away.

[8:20] Your sins are atoned for. However, he learns a pretty amazing truth. That his sin is gone. That he is not guilty.

That he is not undone as he thought he was. Isaiah, though, doesn't describe what God is like. He talks about what the angels did, a little bit about them, and what he understands.

But he doesn't describe God at all. John, as we will see in a little bit, does make an attempt to describe God. But Isaiah doesn't even go that far.

The psalmist also makes an attempt to describe God. But unlike John, who we'll see in a little bit, who tries to describe God directly, the psalmist comes at it from an angle.

He describes the attributes and actions. He says, God's voice. Or, this is what God accomplishes. If we look in the psalm, verses 3 through 10.

[9:32] The voice of the Lord. The God of glory thunders. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord. The voice of the Lord. And then he says, The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

Continually in this psalm. He describes what God is like by his action and the effects that his voice has.

But look what the psalmist calls us to do. Look back in verses 1 and 2. Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

The psalmist calls us, and not just us, but all God's people and all heavenly beings, to worship. To ascribe glory to the Lord.

The psalmist, I would say, is able to say the most about God in our text today. Because he uses metaphors. He shows us the picture around God to give us an idea of who God is.

[10:40] And that poetic language gives us a good picture. But even with those tools, he still cannot describe God. But even with that lack, he calls every being with a spirit to worship.

He calls us to honor God. And that response is exactly what John sees when he goes into God's throne room. We see in the text from Revelation, the seraphim again.

We know it's the same room because we have these same creatures with six wings, and they're flying, and they're singing. John is a little bit more descriptive. He says that they're covered in eyes.

He says that one looks like an ox, one looks like a lion, one has the face of a man, and one looks like an eagle. But they're covered in eyes, and they're flying. But they are also, just like before, worshiping. They are worshiping with a little bit of a change in the text, though.

[11:53] Whereas Isaiah says, the whole earth is filled with God's glory, this time they say, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

But they still worship. And when they do worship, we see the response of the elders, these 24 representatives of all humanity.

And they, as the angels worship, worship as well. They throw down their crowns before the throne, and they say, worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. They are worshiping because of God's glory.

We can't understand it, though, or describe what that glory is. We're just unable to. That's what John tries to do earlier on in this.

[13:00] He says, I saw the one seated on the throne. He sees God face to face just as Isaiah did. And this is the description that John gives us, seeing God face to face.

He looked as one of jasper and carnelian. I grew up collecting rocks. That was something that my parents did a lot. So I've seen a lot of jasper, and I've seen a lot of carnelian.

I don't expect everybody to have that same experience, though. So jasper is this usually red to green multicolored gemstone. And carnelian is this red and orange sort of gemstone.

So, John essentially, the best that he can do is say, God looks like a reddish multicolored rock. That's not a very good description.

And the angels and the elders are worshiping because of how beautiful it is. We know that John's description is inadequate.

[14:07] John himself says that he cannot describe everything that is in there. And he talks about more sound and movement to say how powerful and amazing this moment is.

John sees this incredible picture. And he sees everything that will follow. He learns what will happen at the end of time. He's given this incredible knowledge.

And there is no human who can honestly say that John's description is a clear and complete description of the end times. If anyone says to you, oh, I completely understand what John saw and I get it, they are lying to you.

It is not. a good and clear description. It is beyond John himself to describe it to us. But he sees all of this that he doesn't understand.

He sees the end and tries to say what is going on. I think we can all understand his predicament. When you are overwhelmed with something that is just beyond your capability, you use what words you can.

[15:23] They just are not adequate words. But what does John do? What is his response to all of this? I invite you to turn to page 1235 in your pew Bible because we'll see what John actually does in Revelation 22.

Revelation 22 verse 8 says, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me.

The angel said, you must not do that. I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers, the prophets and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God. That is the response.

When John sees all of these things, he falls down in worship. When he learns how the world is coming to an end, he falls down in worship.

And then he passes on what he's learned. The angel says, don't close up this book. Don't hide it. Teach people. Tell them what will come. Let them know.

[16:34] And that's what Jesus' goal is for us as well in the gospel. He taught the disciples and said, look, I have taught you all of these things. I have said them from the beginning.

He wants us to know what is coming. But there are things that we still can't get. Things that we still cannot bear.

We cannot understand. And so what does Jesus do to address that? He says, I have to go away so that the comforter can come.

So that the Holy Spirit can be here and teach you. And the Holy Spirit will guide us. We know that we aren't always able to understand everything that Christ wants us to know.

We see that in children growing up. We see that in those who come to Christ later. Learning and not able to comprehend everything to begin with.

[17:33] But we learn and we grow in these things in order, as it says in verse 14, to glorify Christ. That is the purpose, again, to worship.

Jesus tells his disciples, and he's telling us, that we won't understand everything, but that the Spirit would lead us into truth. And in learning that truth, we would worship.

Now, I know that today is Trinity, and I said I wasn't going to talk about the Trinity much at all, and I haven't, mostly because I can't. At best, I can be like the psalmist and say some of the amazing things that God has done.

But I will talk of one that the Spirit has done for us. The Spirit has led us into truth about the Trinity through the church councils, through our fathers.

The Holy Spirit has led us to believe to know that God is three in one. So we believe what we cannot truly understand.

[18:49] We acknowledge what we cannot describe. And in knowing that, we fall and worship. We stand before this indescribable, this ineffable God.

And we do what? guilt. We learn. We learn that God is our creator. That we are lost, but that our sin is atoned for.

Our guilt is taken away. That is the gospel that we learn as we stand before this God. And we worship. We worship the God who created us.

We worship the God who redeems us. The God who shakes the world with His voice. The God who is three in one. The same God who calls us His own and calls us to follow Him.

Amen. Thank you.

[20:18] Thank you.