

Trinity Sunday

June 12, 2022

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Isaiah 6:1–7, Psalm 29, Revelation 4:1-11, John 16:12-15

Last time I preached, one of you smart-alecks apparently said whispered as I started... “I bet he’s going to talk about Star Wars...”

Well, I’m not this week. I promise. I swear. One I won’t even mention by name...

I’m going to talk about another space movie... One set far in the human future, not in a galaxy far away, but in our own. Disney’s 1979 response to the... unmentionable franchise. It was called... The Black Hole.

Deep in unexplored space. An enormous, apparently derelict spacecraft, the USS Cygnus sits precariously on the knife’s edge of danger... hovering at the event horizon of an enormous black hole. The 4-person crew of the USS Palimino investigates, only to discover an army of robots, led by the unhinged Dr. Reinhardt. Driven mad by staring

into the abyss of the black hole, Dr. Reinhardt believes that salvation, God, the origins of the universe and all of existence lies on the other side... In.. Through.. And beyond he says. Our intrepid crew must escape before Reinhardt seals their fate by propelling the vast spacecraft into the black hole.

Now this, you might recognize, is kind of a theme running through some sci fi and fantasy and horror... Be careful, that when you stare into the abyss... the abyss doesn’t stare back... Lovecraft. Poe. Even Indiana Jones gets in on the act.

Our stories and myth warn of us this because, in some respect... it’s true. Our readings today pass long the idea that the line between the known and unknown is something to be feared, to be avoided and to be kept well clear.

When I was 14, I went on a scuba diving trip to Crystal Springs in Florida. One of the locations of the dive was a spring that had a cave at one end, about 60 feet down; the surface was covered with tiny lily pads called duck weed. The vegetation kept the water dim but not dark.

The unfortunate thing was that the cave wasn’t really spring... It was a siphon. It pulled water through the mouth of the cave, narrowed, making the water move very quickly inside the cave, drop down 300 feet and then spits you out about half a mile into a different part of the spring system. Now the problem is if you are not prepared for this if you’re not trained for cave diving and carrying extra air to decompress from that depth...

you're gonna have a very bad day.

All of this is what was going through my head at age 14, 60 feet down underwater as we explored the spring. And then, as we crossed in front of the mouth of the cave, the person in front of me kicked just too hard, and stirred the silt, completely blocking any visibility. I didn't know which way was up because of the weed on the surface obscuring the light. I couldn't see my dive partner. The only thing I could see, was the dirt suspended in the water, and the current pulling the tiny particles of sand towards the mouth of the cave. I looked to my right and saw the black hole of the cave, and the underwater sign with a grim reaper and skeleton of a diver in wet suit, mask and empty air tank. I contemplated this as I felt the current moving over my skin and towards the siphon spring and what would be an assured drowning if I moved with the current.

When we see the black hole, when we stare into the abyss we have three basic choices. We can embrace it like Dr. Reinhardt, and lose our minds. We can panic in fear as I was about to do 26 years ago underwater. Or. We can take a different approach.

I wonder often if the early apostles and disciples of Jesus went through something similar. Think through this with me... WE variously see God described in indescribable, bizarre and unnatural ways. The appearance of jasper and carnelian, two red and crimson semi-precious stones. A rainbow made of green emerald. Angels described as wheels within wheels, covered in eyes and wings. It's not an abyss that is seen by Isaiah and John the revelator, but the fullness of the universe. The one above all. The one who is I AM, the prime mover, existing independently of any other thing, or emotion or force in all of creation.

And this should scare us. It should make us go a little crazy. We cannot be so deprived of newness that we fail to grasp what it is that is going on in Revelation and Isaiah...

God on his throne. God being ministered to by the court of heaven, the evangelists and the 24 elders... 12 patriarchs... 12 apostles. It's an impossible thing, made possible. No wonder Isaiah is never quite the same. No wonder St. John has to be exiled away from people he called up into heaven, this is not a thing among other things, this is the thing that defines all other things in the universe, it is the only one that can say "I AM I AM/" a sentence that is meaningless in English, and nevertheless encapsulates what God is... to define God is to define God via language means making God dependent on other things, which is definitionally not God so we cannot even talk about God intelligibly...

And the apostles, the disciples... Saw a human being do this work on earth. And now they had a problem; by virtue of his death and resurrection and ascension, Jesus is now to be worshipped as God... an odd thing for the militantly monotheistic Judeans in the early Christian community. And how do we make sense of the I AM I AM being able to say... I

am Jesus?

And so they, like today, have to figure this out. How do we see Jesus, the one who walked and talked and ate and healed and cast out demons and laughed and experienced all of life... as sharing existence with the one above all?

Perhaps the central mystery of the trinity, the thing we should be thinking about on Trinity Sunday, is this... that God, the one above all, creator and unmoved mover, the one who fills the temple with his glory... is known not as the unknown abyss, not incomprehensible, not the deep, deadly cave at the bottom of a spring... but as the one who lives.

This is the Gospel. This is why the trinitarianism of the creed, is so important and key to understanding our relationship with the triune God. God isn't revealed as a distant force to be reckoned with, waiting to be satiated by sacrifice, but as a loving Father. Not an unknowable divinity, but as a known and loving Son. Not as an abyss... but a dove.

Because... Even Dr. Reinhardt finds salvation on the other side of that gravity well. Even I, weak as I am, was able to stare down into that cave, and breathe again.

The good news of Christianity is simple. God is love. The I AM I AM knows you. God calls you to his side through the son and empowers you by the Holy Spirit to call others to his side.

Amen.