

Sermon for Trinity Sunday Year B

BY THE REV. TIMOTHY B. SAFFORD

June 7, 2009

[Isaiah 6:1-8](#); [Psalm 29](#) or [Canticle 2](#) or [13](#); [Romans 8:12-17](#); [John 3:1-17](#)

[NOTE: If a piano is available, consider playing the musical notes described.]

Imagine that you are sitting at a piano, and with your left hand you press down on the key in the middle of the keyboard – middle C. What do you hear?

One full note that fills your ears and your senses. It is pure.

Then imagine that with your right hand, you press down very, very gently on the key exactly seven keys above middle C, the note of C one octave above middle C. Imagine you've pressed the key so gently that the hammer doesn't strike the strings in the piano. Those strings remain undamped, or as the musicians say, "open."

Now, without moving your right hand or releasing the key an octave above middle C, imagine that once again your left hand presses down on the piano key for middle C, and once again hear that beautiful tone. Now, imagine letting go of middle C.

You might expect that all sound would stop.

But you can still hear a musical tone.

The vibration of the strings of middle C has caused the strings to vibrate on the C note one octave above – so much so that you can hear it softly. The undamped, open note has been made to resonate by the lower note. The vibrations of middle C have given life to the strings one octave away.

So, this might be another way to imagine God – not another way to see God, but a way to hear God. God is that powerful musical tone at the center of the universe, vibrating so steadily that all that is open and undamped will begin to vibrate also.

Imagine that you are those open strings one octave above middle C. You begin to resonate, not because something, or someone, has struck you or plucked you as a harpist does, but because you are open and in tune with God.

We are able to resonate with God because we are made to be in tune with God, a gift imparted by being created in the image of God.

The Anglican theologian and musician Jeremy Begbie encourages us to use music to help us imagine God – not in images, but in musical sounds. Just as one note in the piano sounding will cause another to resonate, In the book *Beholding the Glory*, Begbie writes that God interacts "with the world intimately, without violating it or merging with it, liberating it to be more fully itself."

Our God truly is a liberating God, not a controlling God. In our resonance with God, we move from dissonance to tunefulness, which is freedom to live fully into God's image of us, not the world's version of us. Begbie writes:

"God's involvement with our lives neither pushes us out, nor swallows us up, nor leads to some kind of fusion. God does something much more creative: through intimate interaction with us, God frees us to 'sound' as we were created to sound, enabling us to be more fully ourselves. We are not de-humanized,

but re-humanized.”

With this in mind, listen to Jesus’ words to our old friend Nicodemus. Jesus tells him, “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Jesus strives to put Nicodemus in tune with the music that God makes in the creation. He does not de-humanize him, but seeks to re-humanize him by liberating his spirit from the brokenness and folly of the fallen world – so that his spirit may be resonate with the Spirit of God that has given life to all of the creation.

Is it allowable to think of being “born from above” as God’s profound music at the center of the universe causing us to come alive because we resonate with God’s very music in the creation itself? Can it be that Nicodemus, in asking his questions of Jesus, is seeking to undampen himself from all that keeps him from resonating with God, a desire he feels because he sees others in Jesus’ midst resonating with God?

Jesus tells Nicodemus, “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ 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.”

We hear the music of God, and do not know from whence it comes from. This music gives us birth, for we resonate with the music within the Spirit of God.

Maybe St. Paul is sharing the same truth when he writes to the church in Rome, “All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” We are suggesting, “All who resonate with the music of God are children of God.”

Paul then says, “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” We might say, “When we resonate with God’s music, it is the very vibrations of the Spirit of God vibrating our spirit, showing us how we are birthed by God, making us children of God.”

God begets us by making us sing the same song of God’s creation.

In our musical musings, one note vibrating causes another to do the same. That reality is a model of the incarnation. When we resonate with God, similarly, God is incarnate within us. The challenge is to make our resonance possible by being in tune. Tunefulness is certainly a gift of grace, but we tune ourselves by sharing in the life and death of Christ.

Paul said if we suffer with Christ – meaning, if we imitate his life – “we may also be glorified with him.” We might say, “As we incarnate Christ into our very being, we will resonate with God in the same way that the Son resonates with the Father.”

If we say that the Father resonates with the Son, we are saying that the Father is incarnate within the Son. When we resonate with God, God is incarnate within us. The music of God animates us. The Spirit – if in this moment we can hear the Spirit as the wind of God’s glorious music – gives us life by making us resonate with God.

As this is Trinity Sunday, maybe we should say that there is not one note, but three notes – a full chord – playing at the center of the keyboard that makes resonant the other open note. In *Beholding the Glory*, Jeremy Begbie asks:

“What could be more apt than to speak of the Trinity as a three-note-resonance of life, mutually indwelling, without mutual exclusion and yet without merger, each occupying the same ‘space,’ yet recognizably and irreducibly distinct, mutually enhancing and establishing each other? To speak of

three strings mutually resonating instantly introduces a dynamism ... far truer to the trinitarian, living God of the New Testament.”

The Lord’s voice is the music at the center of all life in which we strive to be in tune. Through our being formed in Christ, by imitating the life he showed us, we turn from the sin of the broken world that dampers us, and open ourselves to being made resonant with the eternal life of God.

Jesus explains it this way to Nicodemus: “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.”

On this Trinity Sunday, we give thanks that we do not perish, but are made eternally resonant with God the Father who resonates with God the Son who resonates with God the Holy Spirit, the very “three-note-resonance of life, mutually indwelling, without mutual exclusion and yet without merger.”

Better yet, just listen for the music.

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Published by the Office of Mission Communications of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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