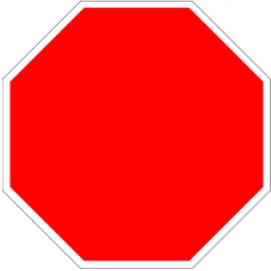


Trinity Sunday 2017 - Welcoming the Stranger

What do these signs mean?



Signs help us understand concepts and ideas.
They teach us meaning beyond themselves.



What is this a picture of?

Is this what God really looks like?

No, of course not. It is a symbol to help us understand God is three and one.
Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

<http://www.sacredheartpullman.org/icon%20explanation.htm>

Genesis 18:1-15

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³ He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."

⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

⁹ "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

"There, in the tent," he said.

¹⁰ Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

¹³ Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Trinity Sunday: Welcoming the Stranger

Icons



Icons tend to be a practice of the Eastern Orthodox church.

Justin Tse's Icon Corner - Eastern Rite Catholic

In history the use of Icons was eliminated in certain protestant traditions because it was thought of as a form of idolatry.

Particularly, the second commandment of making a "graven image" or "idol" of God.

This commandment was misinterpreted as not making any image of God.

In reality, what it is about is mis-representing God as a creature; mythological or created.

Our God is not a horse or cow or griffin or dragon or a human.

The commandment is about simplifying God into something we can understand of control.

This is why the entire idea of the Trinity flies into the face of idolatry.

The Trinity withstands any effort to make an image or analogy.

Nothing is three persons and one at the same time - no one but God.

This is the mystery of God.

Icons are objects of veneration.

No one "worships" the object itself.

One is led into worship by understanding the meaning of an icon.

When one understands an icon, one can then think deeply or meditate on it.

Meditating on the meaning of the symbol, the image, the icon leads to appreciation.

Appreciation leads to Worship.

The object of worship is always the triune God.

Which leads us to one of the most famous icons in Christian history.

Rublev's Icon of the Trinity

The Trinity Icon



Andrei Rublev was born around 1360.

He lived and work around Moscow.

He died January 29th, 1430.

He created this icon.

Iconography, is steeped in prayer and meditation, making one is an act of devotion.

It is a physical window into an invisible reality.

Allow me to lead you in a meditation and understanding of this Icon.

The we will take time to appreciate it to let it lead us to God, to worship:

This is actually a scene taken from the passage read for us - Gen 18

It is Abraham and Sarah's interaction with the three men who were just nearby.

The text shifts from referring to them as unidentified strangers to being God himself.

It uses the very covenant name of God - LORD - meaning YHWH

We will look more into this interaction and it's meaning but this is the scene Rublev uses for his icon of the Trinity.

It is the Father, Son & Holy Spirit from left to right.

The Father is robed in luminous undefined colour for his mystery.

He also wears the blue of heaven and divinity.

He is pointing towards the Son.

"This is my Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him."

The Father also looks towards the Son and Spirit.

The Son is robed in the blue of heaven as well as the reddish brown of earth.

In him earth and heaven are met in his nature of being fully human and fully divine.

The reddish hue is the blood of his sacrifice.

There is the gold of kingship - gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The government is on his shoulders as Prince of Peace.

It runs through his earthly ministry and sacrifice.

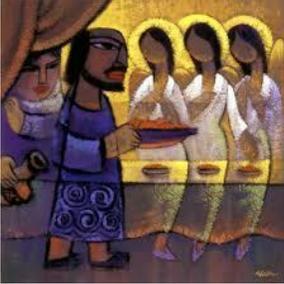
He looks to the Father - "I do only what I see my Father doing."

He points towards the Holy Spirit - who he sends.
The Spirit is dressed in the blue of divinity and heaven
as well as the green of sea and vegetation.
He brings both mystery and growth to those he touches.
Each have golden wings and chairs connoting glory and worth.
The Father and Spirit show their feet, but they do not touch the ground.
There is both transcendence and presence (immanence) expressed.
Each have Halos revealing their holiness and divinity.
Each have a staff or scepter - signs of both rule and pilgrimage,
for God is present with us on our pilgrimage.
There is a balance between both action and movement and rest.
Above the Spirit is a Mountain
A high place of mystery - Moriah, Sinai, Zion/Jerusalem, Carmel,
the places where one prays and meets with the divine.
The Spirit leads us to places of prayer.
The mountain points towards the tree and the House.
Above Jesus the Son is the tree.
The Tree of Mamre where Abraham pitched his tent.
It is the tree of sacrifice, the tree of life, it provides shade and life, the vine and branches.
Jesus leads us to life.
The tree leans towards the House.
Above the Father is the House.
Abraham's tent of welcome where Sarah observed.
It is the place where all other background objects point towards.
We are to come home like the prodigal son.
In that house are many rooms that he has prepared for us.
It is where we are meant to be with him.
Notice now the table.
In the centre is the Chalice of communion.
Within it is the sacrifice of the animal - the calf Abraham prepared or the lamb that is slain.
There is a little square in the middle of the table.
A window to the altar of worship.
A hiding place where a sparrow can nest and raise it's young.
A cleft in the rock.
This table has four sides.
The movement is from Father to Son to Spirit.
There is a fourth person at the table.
It is you.
We occupy the fourth seat.
We are welcomed by God himself into the eternal fellowship of the Trinity.
The Table is drawn in reverse perspective.
Meaning it get smaller towards you rather than towards the distance.
This Icon is an invitation.
It is communion with God.
I have thought of other images to use during communion but frankly
there is no better image to use during communion.
It expresses the deepest desire of God.
The Trinity is about hospitality.

God Welcomes us Even while we are strangers.

Let us worship God through the viewing of this Icon.

Hospitality As a Primary Character of God



The Story of Abraham, Sarah and the Three Angels/Men/Trinity
Is all about welcoming the strangers.

Hospitality and Welcome is a characteristic of God himself.

I keep reminding us to read John 3:17 along with John 3:16.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

"For he came into the world not to judge it but to save it."

A Story about an inhospitable church:

Two newcomers welcoming each other.

Condemning the stranger, being afraid of losing dominance is not the way of God.

Friendship, understanding, acceptance, conversation, love.

To love someone without requiring them to believe what you believe, do what you do or even be like you is the way of hospitality.

It is general grace to all.

It is within the context of this kindness, this hospitality that the truth of the gospel is to be conveyed.

Because at the very heart of this practice of hospitality and welcome the character and person of God is revealed.

Is there justice? Is there truth? Is there heaven and hell and consequence for sin?

Absolutely.

In the Spiritual, "People Get Ready" there is a line:

There ain't no room

For the hopeless sinner

Who would hurt all mankind

Just to save his own

Have pity on those

Whose chances are thinner

'Cause there's no hiding place

From the kingdom's throne

Pity for those who live in darkness, not mere loathing.

Mercy precedes Justice.

Understanding before Punishment.

Friendship before Fear.

Welcoming as a Call to How we Treat Others



The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

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Look at Abraham's actions.

Remember that Abraham is also a sojourner, a nomad.

He honours the strangers by bowing and reverencing them.

He hurried to them - did he recognize them? He certainly recognizes God.

He invites them into his tent.

Makes sure they are well taken care of.

He actually know they are in transit.

This is not even a long term relationship!

He prepared 3 seahs of the finest flour! - That's 36 pounds!

Enough to feed 100 people!

Then an entire calf.

I like steak but c'mon 16 ounces is plenty.

This is a real sacrifice.

He treats God with absolute friendship and holds nothing back.

Curds? It's Canadian Poutine if you add fries and gravy!

This extravagant openness.

Our church is learning this lesson.

What does it mean to welcome a person among us who is depressed?

The physically disabled?

Someone who is divorced?

Someone who is autistic?

Someone who is transgender?

Someone who is a refugee?

Do we welcome the broken?

It is this that separates the sheep from the goats. (Matthew 25)

Feeding the hungry.
Clothing the naked.
Visiting the prisoner.
Looking after the widow and the orphan.
Bringing food to someone who has a new baby.
Welcoming the stranger.

Why?

Being Welcomed as a Way of Trust

What fascinates me about this passage from Matthew 25.
"When you do this to the least of these my brothers, you do it to me."
Tell, me who did Abraham Welcome?
Who is the Stranger?
God is.
And so here is the deepest part of the message.
To foster true hospitality and welcome.
To understand it and make it go full circle,
We recognize that we are the strangers.
You are the refugee, the immigrant.
You are the one in need.
It is about being vulnerable.



God says to Abraham, "You're going to have a baby."
There is a funny sound from the tent.
It is Sarah laughing.
Why do we laugh?
We laugh when something is funny.
But why did Sarah laugh?
What did she want most in the whole wide world?
What was her deepest hurt, her deepest shame in that society?
She was barren.
She had no children.
It was her deepest sorrow that made her empty.
So when she hears what the stranger says, she laughs.
Laughter covers our pain.
Do you know why some comedians are doing so well these days?
Because they make fun of the Trump administration.
If you laugh you would cry.
Sarah denies laughing.
She denies showing her deepest pain.
She was afraid to welcome God into the deepest part of her hurt.
Do you remember feeling like an outsider?

Because of your race, religion, socio-economic situation, stage of life?
Things you could not control or are a part of your core identity?

Conclusion



We are all strangers.

Even after years you can stay a stranger.

Only when we open our hearts to trust each other with our burdens and our pains.

Our quirks and yes even our sins.

When we can show grace to each other and welcome one another.

We are strangers no longer.

We become friends.



And this is what God desire of us and for us.

He wants us to know he loves us.

And so he tells us to love each other too.

And that is the gospel of the Kingdom of God.