

I'm sure that any of you who watch football games on TV have seen the signs being held up in the end-zones of the stadiums. I am told that the signs are held up at other professional sporting events, and are even seen in Australia, at the games they call football (which we know is really soccer). The signs say simply, "John 3:16."

People who hold up the signs are usually folk who think in the King James Version, so I'll quote it like that. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Unfortunately, the theology that often goes along with this well known verse is, "And if you don't believe in Jesus, you're going to hell."

It would be different if the signs said John 3:16 & 17. Because that one more verse says, "... 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." It's the world, everything and everyone in it, indeed, the whole cosmos, that God wills to save.

The quotation comes from the longer passage in which Nicodemus has come at night to see Jesus. Nicodemus spoke admiring words of all that Jesus had done. But the seemingly unconnected reply he received was, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above...."

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that his mighty acts are not miracles to prove that he is who he says he is. Rather they are signs that God's Kingdom is coming into the world – a kingdom which cannot be seen without a change as radical as being newly born.

Those words, 'born from above', which are often translated, 'born again', were baffling to Nicodemus, and are difficult for many of us as well. The language of 'born again' makes us kind of itchy, because we associate it with conservative beliefs that we often do not share. But, however we hear it, new birth is not a

thing that most of us have on our bucket lists. We all went through this being-born-thing once. To risk going through the process again, even in the metaphorical sense of finding new being in God, is to be faced with major change of some sort, like an infant emerging from a warm, quiet womb into a cold, noisy world.

Beliefs we have been taught may be called into question, because they are often inadequate to describe who God is in relationship to us and to the world. Jesus teaches us that to really see the Kingdom of God, we will have to trust in God's grace and mercy and let go of whatever theological structures we, like Nicodemus, have built. And we all have a theology - which simply means that we have 'words about God.'

In the southern United States, for hundreds of years, religious people held a deep belief that slavery was a positive good, which should not end. This belief was supported by interpretation of scripture, by prayers and by preaching. In the entire country, from the very beginning, there has been a theology of our inherent right to take all the land of the continent for our own use, regardless of previous inhabitants. These are not just preferences and ideas, but real theological belief, connected to religious understandings of God and God's will.

Such beliefs may not be ours. But they show that theological ideas are not abstract, unconnected to the "real world". Our theology moves us all to action or inaction, sometimes without conscious reflection. Incompleteness in our own theology may keep us from seeing God's will, from hearing God's call. And I would suggest that what most of us modern Christians are missing, haven't seen clearly and taken into our theology, is the work and the meaning of the Trinity.

Well yeah, about that Trinity thing. You will not hear us talk much about this vision of God, except on Trinity Sunday, because we have a hard time defining what we mean by this, and that

makes us nervous. If we can't make it clear to ourselves or to others, it may be best to ignore it. The Trinity can probably take care of itself without our attention.

So at best we may skip over it with the phrase that is used a lot at my house. When we've misplaced something, or don't understand our electronic equipment, one of us will often say, "It's a mystery." And that is often the end of our Trinitarian discussion too: it's a mystery. This is perhaps why Father Richard Rohr describes the Trinity in the church today as MIA – Missing In Action.

Of course it is a profound mystery, of which we cannot see the bottom. But I believe we can step further into that mystery and deepen our words about God. Rohr writes in his recent book, The Divine Dance, that improving our metaphors about Trinity, can improve our vision, can help us to more completely embody the Gospel, living more joy-filled lives.

God, the three in one, is portrayed in icons and in the meditations of ancient teachers as a relationship of love. It is a love that goes round and round, back and forth. from Creator to Christ to Holy Spirit, a continual communication of connection, regard and oneness. And as the flow of love moves between them it throws off sparks of that love to create, hold and renew the entire cosmos.

William James, the first great American psychologist, when giving a lecture about the science of the universe, was challenged by an elderly woman who wasn't convinced about planets and gravity and orbits. Instead, she said that the Earth rested on the back of a huge turtle. "But, my dear lady", Professor James asked, "what holds up the turtle?" "Ah", she said, "that's easy. He is standing on the back of another turtle." "I see", said James, patiently. "But then what holds up the second turtle?" "It's no use, Professor", she replied, "It's turtles, turtles, turtles all the way down."

Just so the Trinity, which is not simply the dogma of three persons in one substance. It's love, love, love all the way down. The Trinity is love in relationship and communion all the way down. This is the love that sends Jesus into the world, not to condemn that world, but to make it whole. It draws us from death into the life of the holy Trinity. We are reborn to eternally join in the heart of that Triune God, at one with the cosmic dance of love.