
The Waters Have Lifted Up: A Swim Into The Trinity

A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
Trinity Sunday

*The waters have lifted up, O Lord,
the waters have lifted up their voice;
the waters have lifted up their pounding waves.*

*Mightier than the sound of many waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea,
mightier is the Lord who dwells on high. -Psalm 93.4-5*

Perhaps you've heard the story told of the great theologian St. Augustine, born in 354 AD, and who gave critical shape to the early Christian structures of theology. It was Augustine who put finishing touches on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: God is one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Obviously, Christians have been explaining, defending, and re-defining that doctrine ever since, just like we were doing before Augustine, too.

Augustine, the great theologian, was walking along the seashore and spotted a young child with a bucket, pouring seawater into a hole on the beach. When the bucket was empty, the child would scurry back to the ocean, scoop up more water, run back to the hole, and pour more water into the sand.

"What are you doing?" asked Augustine. "Why," said the child, "I am pouring the ocean into this hole!"

"How silly," exclaimed Augustine. "You know the sea is too massive to fit into your small hole on the beach."

The boy replied, "How silly is it then, of you, to think that you can fit the description of God into your head?"

I love that story. I love that story, because I love the beach. The ocean and the beach call to me powerfully this time of year, just as they call to many of you. At the beach, I hear the same words of the psalmist that we heard this morning:

"The waters have lifted up, O Lord, the waters have lifted up their voice; the waters have lifted up their pounding waters. Mightier than the sound of many waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea, mightier is the Lord who dwells on high."

People of faith seem to notice God everywhere. The psalms that we read or sing so consistently every week are sterling examples of this principle. They are poems of faith, but they cry out in pain, sing out in joy, stammer in sadness, lash out in anger. In all those places, nevertheless, the psalms acknowledge the greatness of God.

So it is that I want to use a psalm this morning, Psalm 93, to investigate the doctrine of the Trinity of God. Each year, we are treated to various explanations of the Trinity. The Trinity is love and relationship, we hear. So it is. The trinity is clover.

The Trinity is ice, water, and vapor. The Trinity is Neapolitan ice cream. So it is. Analogies to the Trinity are inexhaustible.

But I believe that the Trinity also appeared to this psalmist, the one who wrote Psalm 93, just as the Trinity has appeared to me when I have walked along the beach. Listen to the first line of Psalm 93.4:

"The waters have lifted up, O Lord."

So they have. I see God, I see the great creative being of God, when I first gaze out at the sea. What a vista that is for all of us, when we have walked through the trees, out over the dunes, and we get our first glimpse of the endless ocean.

The waters have lifted up, O Lord! They even lift up my soul when I ponder their depth and infinite distance. This is certainly the creative aspect of God, bringing grandeur, and harboring, indeed, all sorts of life. The ocean may have been the very source of life on this earth, and it is still the source: the source of water, oxygen, hydrogen, movement, and wind, and nourishment.

"The waters have lifted up, O Lord." The first part of the Trinity is Source: power and creation. This source is unending, like the bush which burned before Moses, but which was never consumed. The first person of the Trinity is unending creation.

"The waters have lifted up their voice," continues the psalmist. I know what this means, too. After I first see the grandeur of the ocean water, then I begin to listen. You have heard it, too. You have heard the steady sound of breakers splashing on the sand, or slapping against the rocks.

It is incessant. It is the voice of God, the Word of God, consistent and rhythmic, never muted. Even at low tide, when the waves are small, the still small voice of God continues. The second part of the Trinity is Word. It is voice. It is the power of the infinite sea rubbing against the finite land. The second part of the Trinity is this infinity of God yet made real and finite and even comprehensible - like water in a child's bucket.

Listen to that voice of God coming in on the waves like a surfer. "The waters have lifted up their voice."

You know, despite the steady sound of the surf, there is also an immense silence at the beach, isn't there? It is not just the silence we might feel in our soul sometimes. It is the silence between the waves. When the waters have lifted up their voice and battered the beach, they then retreat. They retreat like we take a breath; after exhaling, we inhale. When that wave retreats back into the sea, I am struck by an immense silence. It is like the silence that appears at a rest in a measure of music, absolutely necessary. That silence is the Voice of God, too, the Word of God, speaking to me in my very breath. The waters have lifted up their voice, the second aspect of the Trinity.

Sooner or later, there will always be a third part of the Trinity. The first part is source, creation, and power: God the Father. The second part is Voice, Word, and Incarnation; God the son.

The third part, of course, in classical Christian language, is God the Holy Spirit. But I call it today "participation." It is the third line of Psalm 93, verse 4: "the waters have lifted up their pounding waves."

After I have gazed into the infinite sea and registered the grandeur of God, after I have heard the steady voice of Word in the waves, there remains one important movement. I must dive into the ocean. I must participate. I must get in the water. I must feel the waves pounding upon my body. "The waters have lifted up their pounding waves," said the psalmist.

Christian life in the Spirit means participation. To believe in the Holy Spirit means getting in the water. It means letting this grandeur of God wash over us, and letting the sound of the Word actually get into our ears, and into our mouth and eyes, too. It means getting wet, like being born again of water and the spirit.

Yes, it means getting wet with the water of life, and salty with the salt of God. The Holy Spirit is who empowers and enables

that swim. To believe in the Holy Spirit is to be in the pounding waters of God. It can be scary sometimes, it can be too deep. But it can be life giving and transforming, too. It is, finally, refreshing, to be washed in the Spirit, to be baptized in the Spirit.

Yes, I believe that the psalmist knew the entire Trinity of God in one verse of the Bible: Psalm 93, verse 4:

"The waters have lifted up, O Lord,
The waters have lifted up their voice;
the waters have lifted up their pounding waves."

In those short lines, the knowledge of God is made full. God the Creator, whom we see in our creative imagination; God the Word, whom we hear and follow in a beautiful conversation, an interchange, of infinite and finite; and God the Spirit, who washes over us and even pounds us like an exquisite massage, God the Spirit who invites us to participate.

St. Augustine knew that his knowledge was incomplete. His was not the final authority on matters of Christian theology. But he did help us to understand the oneness of God in trinity of persons. His young friend, the boy pouring the ocean into a hole, had it right, too. When he carried that water in a bucket, he really did have about as much of God as he could handle; and it was enough.

Each of us can know God. Even in the smallest areas of our lives, God is there. Even in the smallest verses of the Bible, the most majestic definition of God is there. From a bucket of water this summer, to the widest view of the ocean you can muster, God will be there. Even in the shortest minute of the day, take time to consider this mystery: God the Infinite, God the Creator, actually becomes flesh and creation. God the Creator becomes part of creation. God the Infinite becomes Finite. Father becomes Son, so that we might hear and believe.

Then, God is Spirit. God is Spirit in that shortest moment of the day, when the decision is on us. Do we jump into the beauty and grandeur of God? Do we jump today into love and intimacy? Or do we stay on the shore? Jump into the water. Jump into the Spirit.

"The waters have lifted up, O Lord,
the waters have lifted up their voice;
the waters have lifted up their pounding waves."

AMEN.

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