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"Nowhere to Escape" The Rev. Dr. Andrew Armond (05/26/2024, The First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday)

It is most definitely getting to be summer already.
If you have stepped outside at any point in the past week, you've realized this.
And for me, as a runner, that means I've had a pretty terrible week. The heat and the humidity just, they just smack you in the face and this.
This is it, right? This is every time that I've been for a run this week. This is what.
I look like when I'm done.
And so what becomes really important for me in these moments is the music, right?
The music is sometimes the only thing that can get you through.
And so yesterday on my run, I turned to Nirvana.
Now, like anyone who exercises regularly, I use music so that I forget that I'm exercising.
And sometimes the best thing is to choose something that's familiar. And sometimes I listen to something, I haven't listened to it a long time.
I don't like to listen to new music when I exercise.
I want some kind of familiarity to help me sort of get into a rhythm, right?
That peaceful, that meditative state that you're going for, where you can exercise your mind and your body, but you can forget that you're exercising, right?
Because it's the worst.
So this album defined my entire generation.
It came out in the fall of 1991. That was my eighth grade year.
One of the most powerful things about this music was the way in which it immediately evoked a particular feeling.
This feeling that combined that sense of being lost and anger and confusion and even hope
in the way that it felt to be a teenager for me and millions of others in the early 90s.
This band was a meteor that flamed out quickly.
As Cobain, the frontman, Kurt Cobain took his own life in the spring of 1994
when I was finishing my sophomore year of high school.
And something that happens when a beloved and intense figure like Kurt Cobain dies
far before their time is that they become fossilized and idolized and immortalized

at that particular age.

He was 27 when he died, so he's always been 27.

While it might be an interesting thought experiment to sort of think about what kind of music he might be creating now at the age of 57, like his friend Dave Grohl of the Foo Fighters, it's just idol speculation.

We don't know.

Sometimes when I'm teaching Bible studies or preaching sermons, I mention from time to time

what it feels like to be 45 in midlife and the process of aging.

And my good nature older friends and parishioners will remind me that I'm still young.

And I appreciate that.

Part of why I talk about it so often, maybe too often, is that it's coming as a surprise to me.

And I think that's probably for a lot of different reasons, but one of them is that I think I'm part of a generation

and a culture in which aging was not normalized, it was not placed in front of us

in the same way that it might have been in earlier generations and cultures.

Maybe it's someone like a teen idol, like Kurt Cobain, never growing old.

Maybe it's that my generation is always idolized youth in the various medical and cosmetic ways

you can continue to appear young.

We're even now figuring out how to de-age actors like Michael Douglas.

This film is just from a couple of years ago.

I promise you he does not look like this now.

But they can go in and with CGI and AI, they can digitally un-age or de-age an actor.

Maybe it's because we're all part of a culture in which moving is really common and normal.

And so being around the same people and watching them age and watching them grow old is not as common as it used to be.

So for me, aging feels literally quite remarkable.

It's something I wasn't expecting.

By way of contrast, our readings from Scripture, this Trinity Sunday, remind us that the God we worship is an ageless one.

The changeless one, the ancient of days.

And yet as with many of these glorious paradoxes of our faith, God is also the one who is constantly coming to us in our needs and our circumstances to our age.

God shows up for us according to the changing whims and necessities of wherever and whenever we are.

And I think there's great comfort in this paradox that God is eternally changeless and we change.

And our experiences of God through the times and the circumstances of our lives will change.

Sometimes we need God to show up as a tender parent.

Sometimes we need God to show up as a mighty and rushing wind.
Sometimes we need God to show up as a disciplinarian.
Sometimes we need God to show up as a tender and close-hearted friend.
The ancient Christian heresy that most preachers are trying to avoid on Trinity Sunday is called modalism.
And in the online forums that I frequent, people actually talk about this.
You know, other priests, right?
And they're like, what are you going to preach for Trinity Sunday and how are you going to avoid the heresy of modalism?
And basically this means this idea, which the church formally condemned a long time ago,
is that God is one person who just puts on different masks or modes.
Like in the Old Testament, you know, there's the mask of God, the Father,
and then he sort of shifts modes like a Pokemon and becomes Jesus Christ in the flesh.
And then he changes modes again into the invisible presence of God that we call the Holy Spirit.
And the church says that this is wrong. This is not the right way to think about God.
And the reason for that is that that idea of modalism suggests that God changes over time.
And God's very substance in being that God changes.
But we know this is not so.
However, our experience of God does change over time.
Because we are human beings. We are subject to time and to change.
But God is the unchanging one, the fixed point of the turning world.
The one who defines existence itself.
So what this means is that this is not just a mask that speaks to Nicodemus.
This is the eternal and unchanging God who speaks to Nicodemus in this intimate way.
In John 3, in the middle of the night.
The eternal God, the creator of the stars, offers Nicodemus a word of comfort,
a word of hope, a word of peace in the midst of his stormy questions about what does it mean to be part of God's kingdom?
Yes, the eternal unchanging God tells Nicodemus of new birth and a new kingdom,
in which even we changing and aging and temporary people can be transformed.
Then the God's new, always new, always eternal creation.
And look, we can really not understand any of this anymore than Nicodemus did.
We cannot really understand it even more than as Jesus says,
how do you know where the wind comes from and where it's going?
You can't see it, but what you can see are its effects.
The church that is confessed, the Holy Trinity, is the church where we find God.

It's the church where we see lives transformed.
It's the church where we know the love of God for us.
It's the church in which, and through which we demonstrate the love of God for all people,
it's the church where we receive God's grace through the sacraments, baptism and Holy Eucharist.
It's the church where we celebrate and rejoice together.
It's the church where we mourn and lament together.
These are all the winds of the Spirit.
The effects of the Holy Trinity's bestowal of new life, of rebirth to us,
the nights and fickle creatures.
These are the effects which we can see and know and understand, even if we don't understand where they come from.
Rowan Williams writes beautifully on this icon of the Holy Trinity by the Russian painter Andrei Rublev, some 600 years ago.
Look, there are many beautiful and complicated things that he has to say about it,
and I just want to share two of his insights with you.
Two insights that help us answer the question is, why does any of this matter?
The first is that this icon of the Holy Trinity shows a God who is in motion.
If you were to sort of zoom in and look at where the eyes of the three figures are going,
and if you were to follow the eyes, they would be moving in a circle. Andrei's moving, this love that they have for one another, that they have shared since the foundations of the world, always moving.
So this is a God who is unchanging but has always had a relationship among the Godhead,
father, son, and Holy Spirit, self-sacrificing love, giving love, generous love,
that is ever-present, it's not static or fixed, it's dynamic and it's full of energy.
Even though God never changes, there's movement here, a movement toward these relationships
that define the divine life of the Holy Trinity, with Jesus always at the center.
We are drawn into Jesus, he says, by the love of the Father.
We are drawn into the Father's breathing out of the Holy Spirit.
We are pulled by the energy of the Holy Spirit living in our lives, in and through God's love.
The second insight he points out is that we are given the perspective, when we look at this icon, of a fourth person,
not so that we can see the Holy Trinity in all of its mystery and understand it.
But there's a place at the table here for us.
We are meant to respond to God's invitation, to sit, and to enjoy, and to participate in this divine life and love.

St. Augustine says that the kingdom of God is not something just to be looked at, but something to be lived in.

So the Trinity is an ever open door for us, giving us infinite entry points into God's love and grace,

welcoming us on all stages of our life's journey.

And the last thing I want to say is this, the Holy Trinity shows us that there is nowhere that we can turn

and we are not surrounded by God's love.

It's a circle. It encompasses and encloses us.

The Trinity in this ever-present life and energy means that every speck of the cosmos is shot through with the love of God.

That is, Robert Manley Hopkins put it, the world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It is always simmering and boiling right underneath the surface.

God is multiplication, infinite, and vast, and so we can experience God's love in a variety of ways.

There is nowhere we can turn, where we are not surrounded by God's love.

Nowhere deep into our own shame and guilt.

Nowhere in the midst of pain and suffering. Nowhere in a hospital room where a loved one lies, St. Augustine.

Nowhere in our own heads, in our own justifications and self-denials.

Nowhere in our past lives which may have been full of rebellion and confusion and anger.

Nowhere in our present reality which may be defined by anxiety and pain and doubt.

Nowhere in the future that great unknown in which we and everyone around us will continue to age and change and succeed and fail and win and lose.

Nowhere is beyond God's love.

Nowhere is beyond God's love.

No one is beyond God's love.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Eternally loving and eternally present to us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.