

*how can these things be: the trinity "works" simply because he is the guy in the fire with us*  
Trinity Sunday  
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In between the readings today, we did not have a Psalm, as we often do, but a canticle known as the Canticle of the Three Young Men.

Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers; \*  
you are worthy of praise; glory to you.  
Glory to you for the radiance of your holy Name; \*  
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.  
Glory to you in the splendor of your temple; \*  
on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.  
Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim; \*  
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.  
Glory to you, beholding the depths; \*  
in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.  
Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; \*  
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever

This song comes from the Three Young Men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who have been thrown into the Fiery Furnace in the book of Daniel. These three young men have refused to worship the golden image and gods of King Nebuchadnezzar, so Nebuchadnezzar binds them and throws them into an incredibly hot furnace, seven times hotter than it was normally heated.

And in this furnace, they are not only not singed, not burned, but a *fourth* person appeared in the furnace with them, a person described to look like one of the gods.

And there is much speculation on who the fourth person in the furnace is, and I'm not entirely sure if it matters.

What I find interesting, is these three young men that are in a furnace, do not get burned, and when they encounter this fourth person, this God, this figure, this possible angel of the Lord, this possible Jesus figure, they offer praise to God.

And while we do not know the identity of the fourth person in the fire, we know that the person is the one who protected them from harm in the flames, sustained them and kept them alive, who led them to praise in the midst of a furnace.

While we cannot know exactly the identity of the fourth person in the fire, we know that characteristics of that person. We know what happens to those who are near that person; we know that those who dwell in the presence of this fourth person are not consumed by fire, but live.

And when I hear this story, and hear of the fourth person, I cannot help but ask the question that Nicodemus asks in our Gospel lessons today, *how can these things be how can these things be*

How can a fourth person appear in a furnace? How can three men be thrown into a furnace and not only die, but live and *sing* while in the flames?

*how can these things be*

and the response, is not one of physics, or one of right reasoning, but of God's love. these things can be because God did not come into the world to condemn the world, but in order to save the world.

And similarly, on this Trinity Sunday, we often ask *how can these things be* in relation to the Trinity. How can there be One God, yet three persons?

In the words of the Athanasian Creed, a 3rd

*how can the Father be God, the Son be God, and the Holy Spirit be God, yet there are not three gods, but One God.*

*how can these things be*

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.

*how can these things be*

The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone.

*how can these things be*

The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; the proceeds from the Father and the Son.

*how can these things be*

Nothing in this trinity is before or after nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.

*how can these things be*

How can anyone be born after having grown old? How can there be three persons and one God? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born? Can three enter into a furnace, be joined by a fourth, and come out alive and singing?

*how can these things be*

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.

Beloveds, we do not have to know the answers. This Trinity, our God does not require us to find the correct answers, to figure out how exactly the Trinity "works" in order for God to draw near to us.

Christ comes to meet us in the fire. Christ comes to meet our questions of *how can these things be*.

In our lesson from Isaiah today, we see Isaiah telling the Lord that is not worthy of the call that the Lord is placing on him. *I am lost*, Isaiah tells God, *for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips*.

And the seraph, this six-winged creature, two of the wings covering their face, two of the wings covering their feet, takes a coal from the altar, and touches Isaiah's lips, and the coal has blotted out Isaiah's sin and guilt.

*how can this be*

*how can these things be*

Isaiah does not ask for the coal in order to be made clean. Isaiah does not know exactly how the coal makes his lips clean, just as the men in the furnace do not know how the fourth person with them kept them safe, or much less came to meet them there. I do not think any of us knows on this Trinity Sunday the logic of our Triune God  
*how can these things be*

On Trinity Sunday, and in all of our lives, we become like Nicodemus, asking Christ to explain these things that cannot be completely understood, asking *how can these things be*

And I do not want to fault Nicodemus for asking Jesus to explain things to him. I, too, desire to know more about God, to try to understand how this faith thing works, to find the metaphor or language that unlocks some deeper knowledge of the Trinity.

But I wonder sometimes how much of my own questioning, of our own questioning, of Nicodemus's questioning, come not out of a desire to draw nearer to the Trinity, to the fourth man in the fire, to the burning coal, but away from them, to lean not on Christ, but rather our own understanding, to lean away from the burning coal that will ultimately redeem and heal us.

As a friend of mine Bailey said this week, I hate to break it to you, but it's not your good effort bringing in the A that we're all getting.

It is not our good effort to understand the Trinity that draw us closer to Godself. There was no right understanding or good effort on Isaiah's part that made his lips clean when the coal touched his lips. There was no right understanding or good effort in the 3 Men in the Furnace when they did not die, but lived. And we can clearly see that Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus was talking about when Jesus said Nicodemus must be born again in order to live.

Beloveds, we are not brought into newness of life by the correct view of the Trinity, but rather by the Trinity Himself. We are not brought into newness of life by our own right understanding of God, but by God. We are not brought into newness of life by trying to be correct simply in order to be correct, but that God loves the world, loves each of us, so incredibly much, and draws us into relationship with Their Triune self.

And so, we ask,  
*how can these things be*  
*how can this love be*  
*how can this God be*  
*how can these things be*