

### 5.30.21 Trinity A Better Story, Trinity

- How do you feel about “Moralistic Theistic Deism?”
- Here, I have a print out of those words so that you can see them...
- Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is probably the biggest denomination in our country!
  - Yet it doesn't have a building
  - It doesn't have any pastors
  - And it doesn't gather as a congregation
- So what is it?
- Well, I can define the words for you...
  - Moralistic means that these people think that the role of the church is to teach right or wrong... you know basic morality
  - Therapeutic means that this faith is supposed to make you feel good
  - And Deistic is an old term that refers to the type of god who created the world and that's about it. This god is detached and removed from daily life and the events of the world, and so this god just watches the world and peoples' lives roll on
  - However, just defining the words, doesn't help all that much, but maybe this will help
- This book is the product of a long look at young people in the church, and in particular, what makes them develop a deep faith and remain attached to the church... and what DOESN'T
  - The researchers who wrote this book looked at congregations and their youth in all kinds of churches in the United States – big churches and small churches, Catholic churches and independent churches, Lutheran churches and Pentecostal churches, churches with praise bands and churches with pipe organs, churches with formal liturgies and churches with informal services, and city churches and rural churches
  - And what the researchers found was that many of the young people in our country who did not stick with the church, regardless of what kind of church they attended, are what they called Moralistic Therapeutic Deists
  - That is, inactive, and many active youth understand church and religion as teaching right or wrong – teaching

right or wrong in order to earn god's love, and when they fall short, then they feel like they risk losing both god's love and earning the disapproval of the church

- In addition, many young people talk about religion as being something that is supposed to make them feel better about themselves, but if, or when it doesn't, then they feel that their religion has failed them, or they have failed it, and they feel even worse
- And many young people speak about the deistic god who stays detached from creation, and who is also detached from them, and so they feel little connection to god as more than a nice idea
- Not surprisingly, this kind of faith just doesn't wear very well, last very long, or make much of a difference in their lives, and it often leads to falling away from a vibrant faith and a life in a church community
- In short, moralistic therapeutic deism is a very thin and shallow faith
- So where did so many young people learn this ineffective Moralistic Therapeutic Deism? They learned it in two ways
  - First, sometimes they learned it from us
    - Without realizing it, we in the church have often turned stories of God's enduring love into stories with just a moral at the end of the story
    - Or we have tried to plan and manufacture "feel good" ministries so that youth will have a good time
    - And then, when we adults are put on the spot by a serious question from a young person, so often we have not been at our best, and talked more in generalities than about Jesus Christ
    - And even more important than the content of what we say and do, it is so easy to leave out in our conversations with young people the simple message that Jesus Christ loves us
  - The other place where so many people learn moralistic therapeutic deism from their parents – after all, parents either are or were teenagers, and if parents don't grow beyond this, then that is what they will share with their children

- It was a little past seven o'clock in the morning last Sunday, when on the drive up here for worship, a news story reported that the Gallup Poll has found that for the first time since that they have been doing polls, that less than half the people in the United States belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque
- Now to people like me who read religion articles all the time, this was not new... but the reporter acted like it was new
- And the reporter went on to say that most of the people without any connection to a congregation still believe in god, and they sometimes even pray
- But beyond that, the unchurched often have a faith that is little more than a few words or cliches
- It is often an adult version of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
- So how can we as part of the church do better sharing the richness of the Christian faith?
- Believe it or not, we can tell them about the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!
  - This IS Trinity Sunday
  - But by telling people about the Trinity, I DON'T mean trying to explain the mystery of three-in-one and one-in-three, with head scratching and mind-numbing history lessons – although I can do that if anyone wants to hear it, and sometimes we do have to teach it
  - What I mean by telling people about the Trinity, is *simply to tell a better story. And we DO HAVE a better story!*
  - Christian faith tells a beautiful and rich story about God not making the world like a cake made from a box, but rather about God creating the world out of love, and then continuing to love and admire and care for the universe and everything in it that God has created
  - Christian faith tells a story not just about feeling good, but the awesome story about the God who lives with his beloved people in the wilderness, sticks with people in grief and pain, and brings hope to people who are afflicted

- Christian faith tells an amazing story of Jesus who ate with and loved sinners... a Jesus who fed the hungry and welcomed children... a Jesus who PERSONALLY knows all about human suffering because of the cross, and yet who forgave his killers – and who also forgives us each day, and who came in the words of today’s gospel, “not to condemn the world [and I might add not to condemn people], but that the world might be saved through him. [John 3:17]”
- Christian faith tells the welcoming story of the Spirit of the living Christ gathering people into a church that is NOT a hotel for saints, but rather is a hospital for sinners... and then this Holy Spirit sends forgiven sinners out into the world to show mercy, compassion and love for creation and all of its people on God’s behalf
- This is the trinity – not just an old doctrine, but a much better story!
- The Christian faith and life in Christ’s church is about a vibrant, active, grace-filled, forgiving and life-giving God known as the Creator, the Savior, and the Spirit
  - Instead of morals, good vibes, and a vague god described like this... [print out of moralistic therapeutic deism], it looks like this... [pictures of universe, Christ cross Father forgive them, and church gathering and service]