

“Tripping on Tiptoes”

A reflection for Trinity Sunday
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Isaiah 6.1-8

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[Please read Isaiah 6.1-8](#)

“O my god!”

What? Who? Which one? There are so many on offer. Are you calling to Loki? Krishna? Skanda? An Orisha? Ares? Amaterasu? Or maybe whatever you're giving your allegiance to these days? Money, sex, power are the big ones. Facebook?

God? We use it as if it's a name. That's fine. It's how I use it.

But can three letters do the job? Can any of us really know who we're talking about? Do you? Even in church, can we be so sure? Still, if you're going to worship and give yourself to Whomever it is, you might want to get it right. I don't think we have any choice.

Moses was chasing sheep. He spied a bush, burning, strangely. The Voice spoke, conscripting him for a job, back in Egypt where he had been on the most-wanted list. *“Okay . . . when they ask who sent me, who should I say? Show up in Egypt spouting off about how “god” sent you, and they'll point to images of Osiris, Anubis, Horus, or whomever, and ask “Which god?” “So who are you, Burning-Bush-Voice?”*

“I Am Who I Am.” That's the answer. “Yahweh,” is how you might say it, if you dare. *I Am Who I Am.* Being itself. God's name. Does that help?

Theologians often say a lot to mean a little. Robert Jenson did the opposite, saying a little that means a lot. Who is God? *“God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.”*¹ I like Jenson's take! Focus on what God does. God saves! God raises the dead. God makes a way when there is no way. (Like for Moses, and Israel, and us.) Helpful?

Now that I've mentioned Jesus . . . God? No! Yes! Try to square that.

Or, triangle it.

Another theologian of few-words that say much. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote, *“When*

¹ Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1: The Triune God* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63.

*I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*² The Trinity.

- "God," the One and Only One, Who is Three.
- God the Father is the One God. God the Son (that's Jesus) is the One God. God the Holy Spirit is the One God.
- And the Spirit is not the Father. And the Father is not the Son. And the Son is not the Spirit.

Divinely simple! And not simple at all. Help.

II

What did you expect? If we can get it, it's not God we are getting.

Isaiah receives a vision. ("Vision" does not mean unreal. It's God letting you behold what you otherwise could not.) The *I Am Who I Am*, shows up to the astonished prophet in ways he can maybe grasp. The most majestic throne imaginable. Mind-boggling, aerodynamically-unsound angel-attendants, celebrating who God is.

*Holy, Holy, Holy is God-of-the-Angel-Armies.
His bright glory fills the whole earth.*

Holy . . . sacred, special, un-ordinary, apart, delightfully different.

The prophet freaks. "*I'm done for!*" It's like his breath is literally taken-away; you know what happens when that happens. How can he hope to say anything else, ever again? Even the most eloquent words that could pass through any lips would be filth and profanity compared to this?

Transcendent is a word we use. "To surpass." "To go beyond." With God, it's not geographic, even if your geography is the entire universe. God is not up on Mount Olympus. Not orbiting.³ We're not saying that God is "up there," somewhere, unreachable. Sometimes we talk like that, because our words always fail us.

Transcendent does not mean that God is like us, but with the volume turned up really loud. Like, I am strong; God is stronger. I am big; God is bigger. I am good; God is . . . gooder? I love; God loves more. I get grumpy; God? . . . The Greek and Roman gods were like that, superhuman . . . which, knowing humans, would not be so super.

The difference between Greg and God, is more than the difference between Greg and a slug. How can a slug hope to understand Greg? Nobody understands Greg! (sniff) Can

² Quoted in Jason Byassee, *Trinity: the God We Don't Know* (Nashville TN: Abingdon, 2015), 47.

³ Yuri Gagarin, the first person in space, was said to have remarked while in orbit, "I don't see any God up here." However, the cosmonaut was a practicing Christian so this seems unlikely. Recordings of the flight include no such comment. The comment likely began in a speech by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in a speech against religion. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Gagarin#Personal_life

a slug hope to? Can a slug hope? Maybe not to get stepped on.

But a slug is a fellow creature. A distant, distant, distant cousin, apparently. (Some relatives! . . .) Very different, but both with DNA.

Us and God . . . not even close. Any distance in the whole cosmos, which we cannot even imagine, is less than a hair's breadth compared to what's between us and God. Even that doesn't come close to cutting it.

But it's not even distance, or complexity, or ability. God is not "far," or "better," or "more." Not even infinitely far, better, or more. Nothing in all creation is like God. God is other. Transcendent. Three little letters—G-O-D—can't express that. Nor a universe full of letters, for that matter.

III

The prophet cries. "*Mourn for me! I'm ruined!*" It makes me sad too.

Mr. Slug and me, I'd hoped we could have been something. You know, friends. Can't be.

Me and Mr. . . . Miss . . . Mrs . . . Ms . . . *I Am Who I Am*. What hope is there for us? How foolish am I to imagine You even notice or care! Or that I can call You a "You."

He . . . She . . . They —see, God is non-binary. Gender-less and gender-full. Queer!—They is God. (Grammar fails us too.)

Theologians *do* put things nicely sometimes. This is Augustine: "*You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.*"⁴

The theologian is audacious. He supposes he can write to God! (A slug scribing in slime.) My restless heart does seek its rest in God. But how can that possibly be? Is it a cruel trick of evolution or design, this deepest desire which cannot be filled?

I keep reaching and wanting beyond. On tiptoes . . .

IV

And I trip. I trip over him.

A slug? No. A man, crucified.

God the Son . . . this close. Like this. So close. So gross.

⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions* 2nd ed, translated by Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2012), 39.

God the Transcendent, is so far from our grasping, so beyond our understanding . . . so that God can be so incomprehensibly close. Closer than we are to ourselves.

Jesus . . . the Son, one with the Father and the Spirit . . . the Perfect Community of Love . . . Perfect Love, Who creates with love. Who makes you to be loved. Who calls you "beloved."

Love serves the beloved. Perfect Love serves perfectly.

*So Perfect Love, Who is God,
does not cling to "Godness" as a lofty, distant status.
The Trinity transcends all borders and boundaries,
and so God the Son self-empties of all privilege and magnificence,
and becomes human, us;
becoming the lowest among us:
remaining faithful for our faithlessness,
becoming sin for our sinfulness,
enduring shame for our shamefulness,
submitting to death to break us from ours,
defeating evil to free us forever.⁵*

Crucifixion is absolute ugliness. By the Transcendent Trinity, it is the beauty of salvation. A cross is blasphemy and profane. By the Transcendent Trinity, it's a throne for God most holy, beyond what even Isaiah could imagine.

We can't get God, not because God is so far beyond. It's because God is so closely with. Totally transcendent, and so intimately immanent, all beyond comprehension.

Nothing in all creation is like God. So nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God, the love of Jesus.

The *I Am Who I Am* who delights to spin supernovae, delights more to be Your home, your Rest for your restless heart.

The One who raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt, saves and raises you.

The One Who is Three, invites you into the Divine Dance of love. And if you trip and fall, the Dancer is there too. Fallen for you.

Imagine that? . . . No, don't bother trying. Just enjoy. Amen.

⁵ My riff on Philippians 2.6-8.