

## **"Spiritual and religious" (Trinity Sunday)**

Pastor Hubert Den Draak, Trinity Sunday, May 26, '13

How many times have you heard people say "I'm spiritual, but not religious."

"You go to church, eh? I'm not that religious myself, but I *am* spiritual." Friends, acquaintances, strangers, on TV, on the radio, in the paper, even bumper stickers. It's all around us now, you hardly notice it anymore.

In a previous career I used to work for a medium-sized company, and after a few months I noticed that the owner often came in late for work, by about 20 minutes or so. So one morning he explained to me that he'd often get a take-out coffee, then park his car at a point where he could overlook the lake, and watch the sunrise. "I'm not religious", he quickly assured me, "but that's my spiritual moment, that's when I connect with something bigger than myself". Spiritual - but not religious.

"Religion" has become a dirty word, it's got a lot of excess baggage, so to speak. Maybe it is outdated morality "thou shall no this and thou shall not that", rules that don't apply anymore in the 21st century. Maybe it's the rich, narrow-minded TV evangelists who know exactly who goes to hell and who doesn't (the one who send in money). More likely, it is because of the violence and some really ugly things done in the name of God. And then there's the church scandals around sexual abuse and financial mismanagement.

Religion has become its own worst enemy, and frankly the church only has itself to blame for it.

So we can understand why religion has become a dirty word. Yet the so-called "spiritual but not religious" are throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

After all, it was religious people who built hundreds of hospitals around this country. It was religious people who started the hospice movement, who started Habitat for Humanity, the Canadian food Grains Bank, Amnesty International, and the list goes on and on. Not spiritual people - religious people.

Religion can liberate people from drug abuse and spousal abuse, racial abuse and economic abuse. Think Martin Luther King Jr., think Mother Teresa, bishop Oscar Romero, bishop Desmond Tutu. Religion gives value to the exploited, it gives hope to the hopeless. But somehow... that gets overlooked by the "spiritual but not religious" crowd.

Not to sound cruel, but honestly, anybody can go watch the sun rise over the lake and feel connected to God. Remember the business owner I mentioned earlier? He may have considered himself spiritual, but he squeezed his employees for everything he could without even a simple thank-you. How "spiritual" is that...? How *helpful* is that? For him, and a lot of others like him, there is no connection between those lovely spiritual feelings and daily life.

Does that kind of spirituality have legs when, say, your partner walks out the door, when your kid gets hit by a drunk driver, or when you find out a loved one has cancer?

Now I'm not saying spirituality doesn't matter, because it *does* matter.

We are all spiritual beings, and frankly, we should applaud anyone who finds a way to deepen their spirituality. And if a sunrise helps, so be it.

But... spirituality is only half the equation, it's only one leg. Spirituality on its own is vague, formless, it changes from person to person, and even in one person it will change from hour to hour, depending on how you feel.

That's where religion comes in. Religion gives it definition, it gives it form and shape. It's the 2nd leg you need so you can walk, and get somewhere.

If spirituality is heaven and kinda vague, then religion is earth and earthy.

It is where you *live* your spirituality. Not alone, but in community, with folks who share the journey with you. Religion is how you *practice* your spirituality; and you know what they say, "practice makes perfect".

How *do* we practice our religion? By reading scripture, lighting a candle and praying - *together*. By singing songs - *together*, by sharing faith - *together*. By celebrating the sacraments *together*. By doing outreach *together*. By laughing and crying *together*.

What practice is there in watching a nice sunrise? Or a walk on a pristine beach, or a mysterious forest? You get back home or go to work, and the experience disappears, it doesn't have the legs to carry you through the day.

So here's what I'm proposing. Next time you hear someone use that over-used I'm-spiritual-but-not-religious standby, you tell 'em: "Well, I'm spiritual *and* religious." In fact, the ideal bumper sticker might say something like, "I'm spiritual and religious; there's room for all!" (and no, I don't have a picture of that)

So it's not one-or-the-other. It's not spirituality or religion, as if the two cancel each other out. On the contrary: we need both together.

That's what Jesus meant when he says: You must be born again, of both water *and* the spirit, you must be born of earth *and* heaven.

In many ways, this is what Jesus seems to mean when he's talking about the Spirit, in this morning's reading from John, the Spirit who will actually help you become more grounded right here, on earth. The Spirit who will help us be outposts of God's kingdom *here on earth* as it is in heaven.

Heaven and earth; "I'm spiritual *and* religious". We need each other.

As religious people, we need spirituality. An awful lot of what we say and do would be empty and meaningless without spirituality.

And the spiritual folks, well, I really believe they would benefit of some good religion. Of course there's a lot of bad religion out there, and unfortunately that's often the kind you encounter first, so you can understand their distrust.

So what that's got to do with Trinity Sunday? The Trinity is not some ancient fixed description of God that's written in stone for all times. In fact, if you look for the Trinity in the Bible you won't find it. Some theologians try very hard to prove it is in the bible, but really, the Trinity is something that *we humans* came up with, trying to describe the Divine: how God, Jesus and the Spirit connect to each other. How they relate each other, how they are both different and the same at the same time.

You cannot draw a picture of God. God is not a triangle, or an all-seeing eye in the sky, or three intersecting circles, or a three-leaf clover, or whatever we humans came up with trying to describe God. These are all ancient symbols, trying to capture what we call "the Trinity". But as soon as you say "this is it", it changes on you and transforms into something else, something surprising, something we never thought of before.

*That* is the mystery we call "Trinity": it's not static - dynamic. It's like is an eddy, a current that you can see and feel - but cannot get hold of, ever. It swirls about your body and your soul, and then about the body and the soul of the person next to you, and the next person - and then back to you. Pure and absolute Love. The Trinity is energy, it's action - it's love in action.

So you see, we're *spiritual* because you have experienced God - during a sunrise, on the beach, on a mountain top, in a forest, wherever.

But we're also *religious*, because we have experienced God in history, in shared stories, and what's more: in community.

We are spiritual *and* religious when we have learned that it's not just about me, or my family or my friends - it's about all of us. Being religious means being "as one", "comme une", in community - with God and each other.

We are spiritual *and* religious when we have learned to trust God - and give ourselves away, knowing it will be okay. Knowing there's room for all.

Amen.