

“But if we hope”

Trinity Sunday – Year B
Romans 8:12-17 / John 3:1-17

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may see and hear what you have for us this day. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Salvation. Amen.

Today is the only Sunday of the Christian year when the church celebrates a doctrine; not an event, like the birth of Jesus or his resurrection, but an idea. Christian theology proclaims a mystery, a divine mathematical mystery: One plus one plus one equals One. Father, Son and Holy Spirit equals one God. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer equals one God. It's not fuzzy math...It's divine math.

Trinity Sunday sits silently on the church calendar. Maybe it ought to be a bigger deal, maybe if it didn't sit so close to the Holy Spirit making such a ruckus birthing that big church thing on Pentecost, the Trinity would get more attention.

Trinity Sunday is a day to talk about this God and with God. The ancient image of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is described as a dance. Imagine the three dancing around in a circle, never separated or divided, but rhythmically together in all that they do. As relational beings, the members of the trinity dance, intertwined, acting as one, in sync with one another. This is a beautiful image of the Trinity, but it's also

challenging to follow, because dancing doesn't come easily for everyone. (Just ask my middle school square dancing partner, Kelly Stevens. Yes, middle school gym class--square dancing! Amidst the awkwardness of middle school in and of itself, add square dancing, then add a do-se-do gone horribly awry, and I have a very different experience of any sort of thing related to dance.)

Nevertheless, Jesus has commissioned us in the name of a God who dances, and whether I like it or not, it means we're called to dance with each other too.

Mysterious as the Trinity sounds, this doctrine tells us important things; that God is One and the *way* God is one is in relationship. In Greek the word is *koinonia*, which means fellowship. Imagine God in deep, mutual, healthy fellowship within Godself. Here, the Trinity says that the center of reality isn't solitary, but relational. And the character of that relationship is *love*.

Henri Nouwen, twentieth-century Dutch theologian and author, tells of a time in his life when he was deeply depressed he spent hours gazing on a 15th century icon that represented the Trinity. Three figures sit at three sides of a table. The 4th side of the table is open, and it invites us in. He writes about that journey in his book *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*. He says

that gradually, over many months, through that image, he came to know the Trinity as a Community of Love, a House of Love. In that household there was no fear, or greed, no anger, or violence, no anxiety; no pain or suffering, not even words, only love, enduring love and deepening trust. It was a house, he said, in which he could dwell forever.

To talk about God is to talk about community. It's a beautiful House of welcome, a healthy community filled with laughter. When we speak the Triune name, we make a claim about the mystery at the heart of life. The same God who in the beginning created life also walked the earth as Jesus. The One who experienced crucifixion at the exact same time experienced the death of a beloved child. The One who ascended into heaven is the same One groaning deep within our souls for the redemption and care of creation. When we speak of a triune God we are claiming that the One who created and redeemed in the past is still creating now, still on the move, and that this House of Love will continue sustaining all things until the cosmos has been made new.[1]

I want to believe Henri Nouwen is right. That this community of Love, this house of love can and will endure.

Except, it's hard to appreciate the significance of the Trinity, this community of love, when on any given day, you find yourself in a place of despair, pain, unfathomable loss and grief. Does the Trinity really matter when you face something tragic? What does it all mean if everything you knew about God, doesn't add up the way it used to? Life plus Cancer. Life after Pregnancy loss. Family after the loss of a parent. The downward spiral of relationship you once treasured. What about the community of love then?

When faced with the state of our world today, it's hard to see that we can sustain this community of love on our own. Read the headlines. More school shootings in Texas and Indiana, children separated from their parents at the border, (detained and lost in the system), the slashing of SNAP benefits, high evictions rates and inadequate low-income housing options across this city, increasing opioid deaths, mortar fire across the Gaza border, innocent lives lost, uneasy tensions with diplomatic efforts on the Korean Peninsula, and that is just this week. Perhaps this year more than any, we need to be reminded of the truth about Love. God's House of Love on Trinity Street, perhaps.

That particular truth is the God we worship, is a God of reciprocity and relationship. A God of expansiveness and welcome, very much at work in the world creating, redeeming,

sustaining and still speaking. The world so needs to see from us here today and well into the future that we believe in a creating, redeeming, sustaining and still speaking God who doesn't abandon the babies on the border. The world needs to see from us that our God works through us to sustain SNAP benefits so that hard working men and women can feed their children. The world needs to see from us that our God weeps when classmates run in fear for their lives from their classrooms, weeps with families at funerals and our God weeps again when no sensible gun sale legislation is enacted. This God of reciprocity and relationship, this God of expansiveness and welcome, our God continues to dance with enough space to let us dance too.

Today I am reminded of this. In this season after Pentecost, we are to live as spirit-infused people, fed and led by the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to bear witness to this world creating, world redeeming, still speaking God in all that we do. O that Holy Spirit, she did show up last Sunday in fantastic ways! *I heard it was almost like she wouldn't let you go!!!* But believe me- she will keep showing up.

Together with God and Jesus Christ, this Spirit works not just on Pentecost, but throughout our lives. Like the wind, she makes this space large enough for the whole world to fit in, so that no one, not one single thing falls outside of that intricate

dance she does with God and Jesus Christ. The space that Spirit maintains in the Trinity is a new space.[2] It's the space where community is born and love is nurtured.

Because "God is in the business of creating community", so it is our call as well to create and sustain community.[3]

This year, we need certainly need that new, open, love-filled space as much as at any time I have ever known.[4] This year we desperately need to proclaim the truth of our Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. We need the world to know and feel and see and hear and experience the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

"These three parts of the trinity are incomparably hospitable to each other." Now is the time for us to be incomparably hospitable to each other as we emulate our God. We are called to bear the new, open and love-filled space of welcome to the world.

But if we hope, if we practice hope, then the Trinity and the transformative work of the Spirit is alive and present in our lives. God's love is at work. This love filled space is where we are to love God with all we've got and our neighbors, *all* our neighbors, like ourselves.

The world needs this Word, now. So, speak it, live it, wherever you are and wherever you go and however you are able. In those places of hate and violence, destruction and division, be the new, open, love-filled space that exists within the Trinity. We are invited to make that space "so great that no one falls outside of it." No one.

Amen.

[1] Henri Nouwen, Behold the Beauty of the Lord.

[2] William C. Placher, "The Triune God."

[3] Torrance, James B. Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace. California: Paternoster Press, 1996. Pg. 30

[4] Jill Duffield, The Presbyterian Outlook, 2017.

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