

Trinity Sunday, Yr. A

June 11, 2017

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; 2 Cor. 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Trinity Sunday. The doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be one of the central doctrines of the Christian church. And yet I think I'm on safe ground when I say that most of us, clergy included, probably don't give it a thought from one year to the next. When we do, we're likely to think of the whole thing both as a mystery and as an impenetrable linguistic thicket. So, although we probably wouldn't say, "Why bother," I think that may be where we are.

This morning, I propose to think about the Trinity in a number of ways. First I'd like to talk about it scripturally, and then theologically and then as a model for what church is called to be about and then give some concrete examples of the way it works, right here in our midst.

So, first the scriptural part. You probably know that the Trinity, as such, doesn't appear in Scripture. Undoubtedly, the reason for the Corinthians reading and the Matthew reading is that they mention that three-part formula, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that we're all familiar with. We're also primed to think of God the Father as the creator, as we heard so beautifully in Genesis, and then Jesus, the Son, as the one who came to redeem us and then the Holy Spirit, as the one who empowers us – or sometimes as the one who sustains us in our spiritual journey. So, we sometimes hear the Trinitarian formula that way – as the way in which we think of how we think the persons of the Trinity function: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. One note here, though. By dividing and defining in this way, it's easy to forget that they're a unity and that, therefore, each of them does all that work and that each of them was present from the beginning – here think of the Genesis reading where that "wind from God," which could be translated the breath or the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Think too of John's Gospel in which he's clear that Jesus, the light of the world, was present from the very beginning. So we conveniently divide them but need to remember that all are present, all are eternal and all are engaged in those works of creation, redemption and empowerment.

Then there's the theological discussion. And here, I'm relying on John Macquarrie. He puts it this way. First, the Father is what he calls "primordial Being" Being with a capital B, (Being-in-itself, the philosophers would say). The Father's essence is to enable creation – he's always and eternally saying, again as in Genesis, "Let there be" in an outpouring of love. The Son, or the second person of the Trinity, Macquarrie says, is the Father's agent, "expressive being," The Father's energy of pure Being is poured out through the Son, giving rise to a world of particular beings, like us, beings in space and time. We could think of it like a prism – one shaft of light passing through a prism is broken into various colors. And the Holy Spirit is seen as the Unitive being – the one who maintains, strengthens and restores the unity of Being with all the beings. This unity is richer and greater than the way the world would have been if God's very life, God's being, had never been poured out into our glorious creation. The Spirit's work is to unify and to reconcile all the beings with God, to lift all creation back towards God. It's worth noting that God takes a risk in pouring himself out into creation, especially with the creation of humans who, being free, can return that creative love, but who are also free to reject it and choose not unity, but disorder.

A slightly less heady take on the theology of the Trinity is presented by Richard Rohr in his book, *The Divine Dance*. He begins with the icon that I've made copies of, an icon that was painted by a Russian, Andrei Rublev, in the 15th century. It's a representation of that OT passage in which three angels come to visit Abraham and Sarah, bringing news that they will have a son. The passage is interesting because sometimes it refers to the visitor in the singular as Yahweh and sometimes in the plural as three men; some commentators say three angels. So, there's a dance around this three/one issue even in that early text. If you look at the icon, which many of you have seen before, I'm sure, you see these three figures, sitting together, eating together and, as Henri Nouwen said, it's a picture of a community of Love. No fear, greed, anger, violence, anxieties, only love. So the first thing and the most crucial thing to note here is that the Trinity is about relationship. That God is relational by nature. The second thing isn't as obvious in the picture, but apparently in the original you can see what looks to be a hole on the open side of the table. Art historians think that there was a mirror there originally. Think about that for a minute. If there's a mirror there, then the viewer sees him or herself as the fourth person seated at that table. The fourth person included in that community of love. The fourth person, or all of creation as it's mirrored there, is part of the circle, included in that divine relationship. And as those three divine persons generate the love that makes the very fabric of the universe, of the creation, each of us is meant to join in, to participate in the very life of God and to be, ourselves, agents of that creative love.

This is very unlike what our culture holds up. It prizes individualism, self-sufficiency, isolation. When we look at our problems today, perhaps underneath the ugly manifestations of our present evils – political corruption, ecological devastation, warring against one another, hating others based on race, gender, religion or sexual orientation – underneath all that is our most profound problem: disconnection – from God, from our deepest selves and certainly from those who differ from us. *The Divine Dance* Instead of participating in that divine flow of love, we're tempted to close down into separateness. C.S. Lewis, in *The Great Divorce*, has the soul in hell shouting out, "I don't want help. I want to be left alone!"

So, the Trinity, mutuality, open hearts, participating in the life and love of God. What does that look like in an ordinary congregation? And here, I'm going to quote from yet another of my favorite theologians, Garrison Keilor.

"Back in Minnesota, where words like "tuna hotdish" or "chicken" or "Lutheran" always got a laugh, and a great joke might be one about Lutherans eating tuna hotdish and feeding the rest to their chickens, "Episcopalian" was also mighty funny, especially if a Lutheran become one. To me...A Lake Wobegonian moving to Minneapolis and turning Episcopalian was a case of social climbing straight up the hill, no doubt about it. Our clear picture of Episcopalians was of wealthy people. Yale graduates, worshipping God in extremely good taste. Episcopalian was the Church in wingtips, the Church of Scotch and soda. So, when I moved to NY and walked into Holy Apostles, I was surprised to see no suits. Nobody was well dressed. A congregation of a hundred souls on lower 9th Avenue, a church with no parking lot, which was in need of paint and the sanctuary ceiling showed water damage, but which managed (I found out the next week) to support and operate a soup kitchen that fed a thousand NYers every day, more than a million to date. Black faces in the sanctuary,

old people, exiles from the Midwest, the lame and the halt, divorced ladies, gay couples, the real good anthology of the faith. I felt glad to be there. When we stood for prayers, bringing slowly to mind the goodness and the poverty of our lives, the lives of others, the life to come, it brought tears to your eyes, the simple way the Episcopalians pray.” *We are Still Married*.

And finally, an example or two from Door County. For several good examples, just look at the new Door County Living magazine that features all the philanthropy that’s going on in the county. People, knowing that they’ve received, giving back. There’s that flow of love in action. But I have one other example. A few weeks ago, the Gibraltar baseball team was selling coupon sheets in order to support the team. They were also going door-to-door for the same purpose. I was talking to the coach who happens to be the manager at the Pig and said that I was impressed at their initiative. He then told me about a couple of the boys who, when they arrived at a house, were asked by an older couple if they would help them move a couch. The boys said “sure” and after the couch was moved, they were offered money, which they politely declined, but then they were offered an invitation to supper, which they gladly accepted. The coach said that he got an excited telephone call from them later than evening: “Coach, coach, you’ll never guess what; we just met the neatest people.....” Love, whether it’s named that or not, flowing, back and forth, in good Trinitarian fashion. Amen.