

Trinity Sunday, Yr.A

June 7, 2020

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

This is Trinity Sunday and we usually hear things on this day trying to explain the Trinity – stuff like three leaf clovers or water in its gaseous, liquid and solid forms. Or perhaps by looking at some of the language from the church fathers that, to tell the truth, can seem awfully obscure.

Given our current situation – which is chaotic at best, whether you look at the health crisis, or our politics, or social unrest, or economic stress – I think chaos is the best word. And given that, when I came to these scriptures, my first thought was that there wasn't an obvious connection. But then, I realized that there was a powerful connection because the theology around the Trinity is an attempt to tell us more about the nature of God. I know that you've often heard me say that who you think God is will determine everything for you. I believe I mentioned last week, when we celebrated Pentecost, that our era is sometimes called the Age of the Spirit. Part of that renewed interest in the spirit shows up in the study and writing about the nature of the Trinity. We all know the old definitions: 3 persons in one God. But that can also be phrased as unity within diversity – those different persons, with different functions, still a unity. People writing about this today stress that the

Trinity is all about RELATIONSHIP. The father, the son and the spirit that flows between them – it's about loving relationship, about mutuality, about joyful self-giving. It tells us that God is social and through that rediscovered emphasis on relationship we can come to know that that's what it means to be truly human and also what it means to relate humanely to one another. In one book about the trinity which is apparently extremely long (2-1/2 inches thick says a reviewer), and extremely complex, the final sentence sums it all up by simply saying, THE VERY NATURE OF GOD IS TO SEEK OUT THE DEEPEST POSSIBLE COMMUNION AND FRIENDSHIP WITH EVERY LAST CREATURE ON THIS EARTH. This sounds pretty straightforward, but many people think that God is something quite different: wrathful, judging, full of vengeance. If that's what you think of God, then when you are encouraged to put on the mind of God, I'm not quite sure where you go – I guess to judgment, and self-righteousness and to power, not as self-giving, but as domination.

One of the readings today is from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. You'll remember that the community there was a contentious and fractious group. What we hear Paul saying to them those centuries ago is just as relevant to us today: put things in order, agree with one another, live in peace. If you do that, the God of love and peace will be with you. The relationship

among believers is supposed to reflect the one to whom they belong. For Christians, it's Christ. And, if we look out at our world and are tempted to despair, Paul's final words, that the grace of Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, are with us – those words remind us that while the path to unity may seem closed, or that it's beyond humans to accomplish reconciliation, that's not the case, because there's hope. We aren't alone in this and God can bring new life and reconnection in spite of it all.

And we NEED that reassurance today more than ever. Some years ago, Richard Neibuhr wrote *Christ and Culture* in which he analyzed the ways in which the church and the culture interact. There has always been a temptation for the church to side with temporal power, perhaps beginning with Constantine. And, on the other side, there can be a temptation for the secular culture to co-opt the church. To seemingly get the church's OK for what that secular culture wants to do. But when that happens, the real danger is that the message of Christ gets buried. I remember being in a discussion in seminary about whether there was a canon within the canon, in other words, is there a central message around which everything else revolves. And I would say YES to that question: it's the two love commandments. Love God, love your neighbor. They are certainly articulated in the New

Testament but you'll also remember that Jesus, when asked by someone for a summary of the Hebrew law, said that same thing: love God, love your neighbor. Again, that's pretty straightforward. There may be differences of opinion about how to work out what love looks like in a given situation, but there's no doubt that love is the essential guideline for dealing with all our brothers and sisters – and that, of course, means everyone.

I joined the protestors in Sister Bay for a bit this week. They ranged in age from about 20 to about 80. Their central message, because of the death of yet another black man at the hands of the police, was BLACK LIVES MATTER. But I couldn't help but remember that Sunday School song: Jesus loves the little children....all of them. All lives matter. All need to be respected and loved. All need to be given the opportunities necessary to thrive.

Loving everyone, doing the loving thing in every situation is the invitation, or even, one could say, the command, given to a follower of Christ, or a lover of God. That's clarity on the positive side. There's clarity on the other side as well, however. Clarity about what we can say is unequivocally wrong. RACISM IS WRONG, POLICE BRUTALITY IS WRONG, LOOTING AND ARSON ARE WRONG, ATTACKING PEACEFUL PROTESTORS IS WRONG, SEEKING TO SOW DIVISION AND STRIFE IS WRONG. And using

the sacred symbols of the Bible and the Episcopal Church for partisan politics is wrong. I would note that it's easy to hold up a Bible, but one has to open and study it to get the message of God. I remember reading a story about a grandfather who gave his grandson a Bible for some occasion. Somewhere in its pages, he tucked a generous check. The check was never cashed. The Bible has to be opened, it can't just be brandished as a prop.

A number of Episcopal bishops and a Catholic bishop responded to the photo-op at St. John's. Our own bishop pointed out that it's always difficult for a church leader to talk about politics. But he also pointed out that the Bible is full of what we would think of as political things, in the sense that politics has to do with the good of the polis, the good of the people. So, the Bible talks about care for the poor and the need for reconciliation and justice and peacemaking.

Former President Bush also commented and said that it's time to reexamine our tragic failures when it comes to our foundational truths that all are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights.

Someone noted that Abraham Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, when the nation was torn and bleeding had words, not of domination, but of charity. Those are the words we need to hear today. Let me remind you of them:

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE, WITH CHARITY FOR ALL, WITH FIRMNESS IN THE RIGHT AS GOD GIVES US TO SEE THE RIGHT, LET US STRIVE ON TO FINISH THE WORK WE ARE IN, TO BIND UP THE NATION'S WOUNDS, TO CARE FOR HIM WHO SHALL HAVE BORNE THE BATTLE AND FOR HIS WIDOW AND HIS ORPHAN, TO DO ALL WHICH MAY ACHIEVE AND CHERISH A JUST AND LASTING PEACE AMONG OURSELVES AND WITH ALL NATIONS.

It's time for that message to be articulated once again: charity, unity, healing, care for one another. Surely to that we can all say, Amen.