

Sermon for June 12, 2022 by The Rev. Lydia Gajdel
First Sunday after Pentecost Trinity Sunday Year C
St. Paul and the Redeemer Episcopal Church – Chicago, Illinois

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Mother of us all.

I was sitting on my parents' couch in Des Moines a few weekends ago when my mother appeared out of a back storage room holding a giant plastic tub with my name emblazoned on the top in bright red letters. With a loud thud, it was dropped at my feet unceremoniously and an afternoon of nostalgia began. I spent hours sifting through photos of my childhood. Four-year-old Lydia standing on the dock at the cabin in Minnesota with a fishing pole in one hand and a tiny fish that I proudly displayed in the other. 16-year-old Lydia sitting on the hood of my car in the parking lot of my high school, unclear what exactly I was doing, but no matter what was happening I felt really cool. But the best was a series of photos taken at my first summer of cello camp when I was six.

In the first photo, I am standing in front of the music building at the University of Northern Iowa. My cello is on my back and my t-shirt is tucked so far into my shorts that my outfit is taking on the vibe of a unitard. I look terrified. Cut to the next photo. Seven days later. It is twenty tiny cellos being played by soon to be second graders. I am nestled in the middle of the group with a look of sheer determination on my face. The final photo is me and my cello teacher standing on the stage. I'm pretty sure I am crying. I am definitely sweating.

I don't remember this experience, but my mother remembers every detail like it was yesterday. These photos mark several firsts in my life, but the one that she loves most is the fact that this is the first time that I ever played in an ensemble. There are thirty years' worth of photos of me making music in orchestras and jazz bands, but this is the first. And it blew my mind. My mother recalls a stunned little Lydia overwhelmed by the sound, as bad as it probably was, of so many instruments joined together. A wall of music that I could feel going through my whole body. I was one of many, joined together to bring the Suzuki repertoire to life. I played my part to the best of my ability and was amazed at what was capable when my instrument joined forces with those around it to build something beautiful. I played something so small and singular, and it became something big and complex. And you can see it in the photo. This sweaty little six-year-old was awestruck.

Today we gather to channel that same awe and wonderment as we contemplate our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Every year on the first Sunday after Pentecost, the church celebrates Trinity Sunday, recognizing the beauty and complexity of the trinitarian nature of our God. Simultaneously one and many. Whole and part. Multiplicity and singularity all in one. One God. Three persons. Love incarnate in whose image we were created.

The Trinity has been a part of our theological landscape since Theophilus of Antioch dropped the concept of "trias" in the original Greek in 180 AD and was conceptually codified by Tertullian in the Latin shortly thereafter. Since then arguments about the functions of each member of the godhead, origin and generation, and characteristics and attributes have swarmed around the Christian understanding of the identity of God. Scholars from Augustine and Aquinas to Moltmann and Rahner have devoted intellectual blood, sweat, and tears to the interrogation of the Trinity, all in search of a deeper notion of God's true self. If you ask the Episcopal church, on this Trinity Sunday we "celebrate 'the one and equal glory' of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, 'in Trinity of Persons and in Unity of Being.'"

Today, we honor the relational complexity of our God. The reality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existing as three separate entities and also one. Intertwined in the complexity of relationship and yet

simply experienced as Love. This understanding of God holds the both/and in tension. Both simple and entangled. One and distinct. Multiplicity and interconnection incarnate. All true simultaneously.

While a beautiful theological concept, the full measure of the Trinity as an idea can be hard to grasp. When I was a youth pastor, I was teaching a confirmation class on the Trinity and I heard an 8th grader earnestly mumble to his friend, “Kinda like my 3 in 1 bodywash/hair stuff, right?” “Not to be sacrilegious,” I responded, “but...yeah...kinda.” Any tool helps to bring the heady into the lived understanding.

Which is why it is imperative for us to remember on this particular feast day, that the image of God as three in one that we celebrate is the image in which we were created. We are relational creatures created in the image and likeness of a relational God. Within each of us lies the both/and of complexity. Chaos and calm. Furious speed and the slow drawing out. One human and the intricate and overlapping identities that build the creatures that stand before us.

And it is through this recognizing, this pausing and paying attention to the multitudes within each of us, that God continues to reveal God’s self to us as Trinity, three in one. As we grow and change, we learn that revelation is a part of being human, part of relationships. The world declares itself to us every day, surprising us with newness and asking us to respond. The people who we love - partners, children, friends – turn into new versions of themselves before our eyes, nurturing and inviting us into identities that embody who they truly are. Plans that we have made for a future yet to come fall apart and are rebuilt anew on foundations we did not even know existed. Parts of ourselves long hidden and seeds newly planted become unearthed by experiences and relationships that draw us out of ourselves. And with each new revelation, we experience God’s multiplicity. God at work in the world through us. Showing us the complexity of our existence as relational creatures.

Begging us to take the stance of that scared, sweaty six year old. Sitting in the midst of all of those other cellos. Being blown away by the power of one sound created by many voices. In that moment, that little kid learned more about recognizing God in the world than a seminary education could ever teach her.

As we gather together in this holy space, made holier by our very presence, we celebrate God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We proclaim our belief in one God, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Jesus Christ, the only begotten child of God. The Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of God every day. Three persons. One God. The image of relational beauty and complexity in which we were made and the constant revelation of God’s love for us in the world. As we face the complexity in our midst, may we continue to enter into relationship with our God with awe, wonder, and curiosity at the multiplicity before us.

Amen.