

## Sermon | Trinity Sunday, June 4, 2023

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20 | The Rev. Barnabas Pusnur

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Welcome to Trinity Sunday! Here is a quote from a book I was referring to preparing for today's sermon: "Trinity Sunday has been the bane of preachers for generations. Senior pastors regularly dump the preaching for this Sunday on their junior associates." I'm not sure what the motivations for me preaching today are, but nevertheless welcome to Trinity Sunday!

This Sunday is a sort of theological culmination of the disciples' understanding of God. These disciples were Jews who worshipped the one sovereign God of Israel. When they met Jesus, his teachings, his miracles, his presence, and most significantly his resurrection from death led them to worship him as Son of God. Fifty days later, on Pentecost, they saw God as the Holy Spirit that came down upon them in power. And so today we mark Trinity Sunday, when we join the disciples and the first century Christians in worship of the triune God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

While we worship the triune God, we also seek to understand the Trinity. While we acknowledge that God is ultimately infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet we try to employ our God given rationality to understand God better. The fundamental question in understanding the Trinity has been how the one God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The great fifth century theologian, Augustine of Hippo, lays out the pieces of the puzzle in seven statements: the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God; the Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Father; and finally, there is only God. (Phillip Cary, *Good News for Anxious Christians*, 2010, p 185). Understanding of the Trinity is not fundamentally just a numerical problem of how God is one and three. The question is how do these different statements of God, fit into a rational coherent whole.

In every age, people with different backgrounds and contexts have used analogies and concepts to give content to the doctrine of Trinity. It was in the fourth century, when for the first time Christians tried to give serious thought to this doctrine. This was in response to some people's idea that Christ may not exactly be God. He may be a little lessor than God. The idea was that Christ is not The Creator but a created one. And so, there was a time when Christ did not exist. A council of about 300 bishops and priests was called in the ancient city of Nicaea which was in present day Turkey. There a creed, or a summary of the faith was made official. This creed along with some emendations made in the next council, came to be finally called the Nicene creed: the creed that we say in our liturgy. About Christ, the creed clarifies that Christ is 'begotten, not made.' Christ is not made or created like other creation but is from time immemorial begotten from God: 'eternally begotten'. The creed insists that Christ is: 'God from God, Light from Light' and 'of one being with the Father.' About the Holy Spirit the creed asserts that Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified."

Analogies and concepts such as begotten, giving birth, of light generating light, and of one being or substance were used at this time. Later Christian thinkers have attempted to use different analogies. Some were material analogies like: the sun, the sun's rays, and the warmth which it produces; or the fountain, river, and stream; or the root, tree, and fruit. There were also analogies that explored the psyche of human beings. The idea was that since humans are created in the image of God there must be some parallel to the trinity structure in us. And so, analogies like feeling, intellect, and will; or mind, word, and love, were also proposed.

There is much to learn and find both intellectual and spiritual satisfaction from the different attempts. But ultimately all our analogies are finite and limited. Augustine, who himself gave many analogies to understand the Trinity, states this truth. He says: "Even when he [God] reveals himself, God remains a mystery beyond words: If you understood him, it would not be God."

In our Gospel today, we see the resurrected Jesus tell the disciples in the final chapter of Matthew: Go, make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is one of the few instances in the scripture when the name of the triune God is expanded explicitly. Baptism is in the name of the triune God. Baptism is the sacrament whereby we belong to the community of God's people. This beginning and initiation into the life of the church is bestowed upon us in the name of the fullness of the triune God, as if in the breadth and depth of all that the triune God is. It's like God welcomes us with open arms, into the life of the triune God, into all that the Trinity is: the comprehensible and mysterious, the natural and the miraculous, the intimate and the transcendent.

We the community of the people of God reflect some of that breadth and depth of the triune God's fullness. The Genesis account says that we all are created in God's image. Maybe the Trinity is reflected not so much in the individual human being as in the richness of the community. The particularity of each of our experiences, our different personalities, our diverse backgrounds, all these are possibly a reflection of the richness of the Trinity. No two humans are exactly the same.

In Baptism, each of us is welcomed not only into the life of triune God, but into the life of a rich and diverse community. And in this community, we learn and grow with each other. We learn things that we couldn't have learnt as a solitary Christian. Last Sunday was a beautiful testimony of our richness as we worshipped in multiple

languages. I believe the best way to enjoy the richness of God's community is to open ourselves in humility and love to each other. Some of the things we learn from others may be pleasant and easy but other things might be more challenging and painful. And yet to grow in fullness, we humbly open ourselves and give of ourselves to others.

It's a sort of vulnerable living. A living that sometimes may cause discomfort or even strife. St. Paul in his second letter to the church in Corinth, is quite explicit about the pain, conflict, and tears that he experienced with that community. And yet, as he closes his letter, he calls them to love and peace. He says: "Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you." And he ends with: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." This benediction or blessing in the name of the triune God is again one of the few instances in the scripture in which the trinitarian name is expanded.

So, if in Baptism we enter into the richness of the community in the name of the triune God, we are also sustained every moment in this community through the blessing of the same triune God. Through thick and thin, in joys and sorrow we are constantly bestowed upon with the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Spirit.

Our annual picnic today is a celebration of that community: a community that is from the beginning to the end covered with the richness of that triune God. A community where we open ourselves to God and each other in humility and love, to grow and serve. Like the first disciples, we embark on a journey of worship together experiencing the fullness of the triune God every time. Amen.