

Trinity Sunday 2010 C
Texts: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Psalm 8
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” John 16:13

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Here we are the week after Pentecost, known throughout the Christian world as Trinity Sunday. It is the one Sunday that we celebrate a teaching of the Church, not an event in the life of Christ. For us to celebrate a doctrine tells you something of the importance of that doctrine. Today is the day that we celebrate the Triune God. Today we celebrate the essence of God and not the action of God.

The Trinity is an unfathomable mystery that through the ages has confused and confounded people. We may not understand the Trinity completely, but we can make a good faith effort to, within our human limitations, try to articulate what we know of a limitless God, always knowing that our efforts fall far short.

There has been confusion about the Trinity from the beginning. It wasn't until 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicea that things kind of got sorted out. The Trinity is not mentioned in scripture but is alluded to through out the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. The Trinity is foundational to our faith, but it is still, even after almost 1700 years, hard to grasp.

I came across a story the other day that I hadn't heard before about St. Augustine. St. Augustine was walking on a beach with one of his students. They were talking about the Trinity and the student was having a really hard time trying to understand the concept of a God that is one yet three.

St. Augustine sees a little boy who keeps running back and forth between the sea and a hole that he has dug. Back and forth and back and forth this child runs, filling his cup with the sea water and running

back to pour it into the hole. St. Augustine asks the little boy what he is doing and the boy replies, “I’m pouring the ocean into this hole.” St. Augustine turns to his student and says, “That is what it is like for us. Trying to understand God as the Trinity is like trying to pour the entire ocean into that small hole.”¹

This difficulty in grasping the Trinity seems to be a problem that has been present not only through the ages, but also is a problem that cuts across cultures.

There is a story of a missionary who went to Japan to live among and minister to the people of that country. He spent years living and working beside the people in the village and teaching them the tenets of the Christian faith. Finally, after teaching them about the Trinity, an elder of the village says to him, “Honorable Father, very good. Honorable Son, very good. Honorable bird I do not understand at all.”²

So, as you can see, don’t despair if you struggle with the Trinity, you are in very good company.

Ultimately, if you remember nothing else about the Trinity, remember this one fact...it is all about relationship. It is about the relationship that God has within himself and with his creation.

The Trinity makes God personal...not just part of God; not just God who dwells beyond us or God as Jesus who dwells among us; and not just as God given us in the Spirit to dwell in us, but all of God, all the time.

We see in the Trinity a relationship that is equal and enduring and complete. We see in the Trinity a relationship that is completely interdependent and completely free. We see in the Trinity the perfect unity that God desires for us in all our relationships, but especially in our relationship with God.

One writer has stated, “The Trinity is God in relationship in a way we are not-God is in relationship in the way we were supposed to be from

¹ Rev. Dan Appleyard as told in Angelus, newsletter of Emmanuel Episcopal Church vol. 44, No. 18 May 26, 2010

² Synthesis, Trinity Sunday 2010

the beginning.” The Trinity is the love that God desires for us and has desired for us from the beginning of time, but we have lost our way. We have wandered away. We could not accept the total and complete love that God has for us.

Jesus tells his disciples in this morning’s gospel reading, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”

Sometimes we cannot bear things, not because they are so awful, but because they are so awe-full. They are so amazing we can’t get our heads around them. They are so wonderful that to experience them is transcendent, other worldly; there are no words to describe what is being experienced.

Perhaps, just perhaps, the love that is within God, the Trinity that is the unfolding of God’s love for us, is one of those things that in this lifetime is too wonderful to bear or understand.

Last week we celebrated Pentecost, the event when the Church was given the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of all truth. Although God, known in the flesh as Jesus has to leave the disciples, they and we, the twenty-first century disciples, are given the gift of God within us-the Spirit of Truth. We will know that it is God’s Spirit in us because it will lead us back to the way of God, back into that love that is the essence of God.

I heard about an article that was written several years ago. It was about a virus that was attacking migrating geese. This virus attacked their navigational system. All the birds did was fly in circles. They couldn’t get back to where they came from and they couldn’t get to where they were supposed to be. There are some birds that become hopelessly lost and if they don’t make that trip they will die.³

Any of you that have navigational systems in your car know how helpful they can be, in fact, when my twin sister got so sick on the way to Florida last October, had she not had a GPS in her car she most likely would have died. As it was, the GPS was able to tell her where the

³ After extensive looking I could not find the article or the essay it was mentioned in.

nearest emergency room was and how to get to it. That built in navigation system saved her life.

I think the Holy Spirit is like that. I think we have a built-in God Positioning System. Jesus is leaving and yet there was one last give to give, the Spirit of all truth-the Holy Spirit. We know it is the Holy Spirit because it continuously reorients us to the right path, it gets us on our way back to God.

But there are many times when we, like the geese, get a virus. Ours is called sin and it screws up our sense of where the true path is that will tell us not only where we came from but will also take us to where we really should be headed.

Sometimes we short out our own network or refuse to listen to the directions given and as a result wind up going in circles, circles that include the same death dealing behaviors, the same painful relationships, the same short sighted actions that get us hopelessly lost.

But we always, always, have the hope that is present and revealed in the Trinity. God, the three in one, the one in perfect relationship and who desires nothing more and absolutely nothing less than to share that perfect relationship with us, calls us back, heals us and reminds of us of where we came from, whose we are, and where we are going back to-back into the very essence of God which is God's love.

The best summary of the Trinity that I have read in a long time comes from an old classmate of mine at Valparaiso; the Rev. Dr. Luke Bouman, who is currently a bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. I would like to close with his words.

“In the context of God’s loving action in the world, the Trinity describes a God with characteristics that go far beyond our knowledge and sight: a God who gives his life for his creation; a God who uses love, not force, to change that creation from within; a God whose Spirit moved through the creation from before the dawn of time, and moves through creation now; a God that is not observing us from a distance, but is present and active in all of life; a God that does not exist only in the powerful and beautiful things of this world, but also the weak, the outcast and the

failed things. The Trinity is a story of an unexpected God, in relationship with us in unexpected places and unexpected ways.”⁴

All I can say to that is thanks be to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

⁴ Rev. Dr. Luke Bouman, Sermon on the Festival of the Holy Trinity, June 3, 2007. Tree of Life Lutheran Church, Conroe Texas. www.predigten.uni-goettingen.de/predigt.phd?