

Trinity Sunday
May 30, 2021
Genesis 1:26-2:3, Psalm 8
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You may have heard the story about the little girl in a Sunday school class who was drawing intently. She was totally focused on the task before her, using all her colors. Her curious teacher strolled over to watch, and finally asked, "Sweetheart, what is that you're drawing?"

"Well, I'm drawing a picture of God!" the girl replied

"That's a wonderful idea," her teacher responded, "but nobody knows what God looks like." Without missing a stroke of her crayon, the little girl replied, "They will in just a minute."

Don't you wish it were that easy to fully see and comprehend God?

In the rhythm of the liturgical year, today is Trinity Sunday. It's not a day that gets a lot of press. We don't have any liturgical banners to help us mark the day, we didn't plan the Scripture reading in 4 different languages or do anything else special. That's unfortunate, but it's also understandable. You see, all of the other church festivals and holy days - Advent and Christmas, or Lent and Easter, or even Pentecost last week, mark **events**, but Trinity Sunday is all about an **idea**, and a difficult one at that:

God is three. God is one.

God is undivided. God appears everywhere.

God is now. God has always been.

The Trinity is a critical concept or doctrine of our faith, but it can be one that's really hard to picture and understand. And as hard as it is to understand conceptually, it's even harder sometimes to see the relevance of the Trinity for our own lives.

Let's be honest. When we're struggling with an illness or having difficulty in a key relationship, when we're dealing with a world-wide pandemic or when we're searching for a new pastor, we just hope that God will hear our prayers and walk with us through our challenges. When we are in one of those difficult periods, it doesn't matter to us if one God can exist in three persons does it?. We just hope God shows up.

So, my goal this morning is not to try to come to a logical, reasoned understanding of the trinity. The Trinity is a concept that has boggled the best of theological minds for over two thousand years. And if they haven't figured it all out by now, I don't like our chances of solving this great mystery of faith in the next ten or fifteen minutes. Instead, I'd like for us to focus on how a relational understanding of the Triune God can make a difference in how we live out our faith each and every day.

We could focus on each person of the Trinity and easily find relevance for our daily lives there. We could focus on God as creator ó the all powerful creator of our vast universe, but also the loving parent who uniquely creates each of us in God's image.

We could focus on the person of Jesus who through his life, death and resurrection continues to teach us how to live and how to bring the kingdom of God to earth.

Or, like last week, we could focus on the Holy Spirit, the One who gifts us, empowers us, and nudges us to be about the work of God in the world. Those would all be great ways to talk about how each part in the Trinity is relevant for our lives today.

But instead of focusing on God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit individually, this morning I want us to think about them together, how as a Trinity they model relationship for us.

Now, I want to be very clear here, there is no developed doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture. At the end of the gospel of Matthew the Trinity is referenced ó Jesus commands the eleven to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. But we don't find a comprehensive doctrinal stance here. We don't find one anywhere else in Scripture either.

Although we don't find a fully developed theology of the Trinity, we see evidence in Scripture of God in all three forms all the way back at creation. In Genesis 1, we see God the creator, that one is the most obvious. In the gospel of John, we learn of the presence of Jesus from before the beginning of time. How does John start? "In the beginning was the Word ó Jesus- and the Word **was** God and the word **was with** God." And as we mentioned last week, we see the Spirit present in creation as the wind ó the *ruah* hovering over the face of the waters.

In Genesis 1:26 God says, "Let us make human beings in our image," Scholars debate whether this is an early reference to the Trinity, but I don't think it's a stretch to see God as relationship or God in community from the very beginning. And I believe that God is modeling how we are to exist in the world that God brought into being.

On the front of the bulletin, you see an iconic image of the Trinity created by Andrew Rublev, who lived in Russia in the 15th century. Through his spiritual practice of praying the Scripture (Genesis 18 in this particular case), he came to believe that the three

messengers who visited Abraham and Sarah and announced the birth of Isaac to them were a precursor of the Trinity. Notice that in the painting, the three persons seem to be looking into each other with unqualified dignity, respect, and love ó as three distinct persons, three yet one. Rubleí left the fourth side of the table open intentionally ó signaling an invitation to each of us to draw near, to sit at the table, and to join the intimate community and relationship that we see modeled there. In a profound sense, the person viewing this icon ó each one of us in this moment- completes the image by joining the divine circle.

Henri Nouwen, well known author and theologian, spent many hours gazing at this picture during a period of deep depression in his own life. He says that gradually, over many months, he came to know the Trinity as a Community of Love, or a House of Love. In that household, he came to realize, there was no fear, no greed, no anger, no violence, no anxieties, no pain and suffering, only enduring love and deepening trust.

What would it look like for us to join that divine circle, to respond to this deep community of love and relationship? How might we live our lives differently if we had this ever deepening connection to God?

This morning, I would suggest that the model of God in relationship extends beyond how we interact with God to how we interact with God's creation. What would it mean for us to have a deep and enduring respect for the world? Both Genesis and Psalm 8 that we heard read earlier tell that God gave us dominion over creation ó but of course this means to love and care for, to be good stewards of not, not to take for granted, exploit or destroy. I can't help believe that if world leaders and CEO's of major

corporations took seriously the stewardship of creation, that we wouldn't have the need for climate accords or debates about global warming -- they might not even be issues.

Closely related to creation are the creatures that God made to populate the earth. We can certainly benefit from paying closer attention to how we live in community with them. We have probably all heard stories or seen shows about horse and dog whisperers, people who have an unusual ability to connect with animals, but both wild and domesticated animals can be very discerning about us as well. In just the last few years, we have learned that trained dogs can detect the presence of certain illnesses in humans, and others work as service dogs, alerting their humans to the pending onset of a seizure. Therapy dogs routinely cheer hospital patients ó from children to seniors ó with their unconditional love and acceptance. Recently I read a beautiful article about a therapy dog who works everyday at a local courthouse, comforting children who are victims of abuse that must come in for difficult interviews.

And cat lovers we won't leave you out this morning either ó because felines can have a sixth sense too. At one nursing home, employees have learned to call the family if the resident cat curls up on a patient's bed ó over and over again this has been an indication that a person is nearing the end of life.

In our fast-paced, humans are dominant world, we often forget that we live in an ecosystem where everything is connected and even subtle changes have wide ripples. How might our lives be richer if we were more attentive to our relationship to the myriad of creatures that also call this planet home? How can we better live into shared community and relationship?

Finally, what would it look like to extend the community of love and relationship that the Trinity models more fully to other people? What would it mean to invite all people – both those we agree with and those we don't – those that look and think like us and those that don't – to take that fourth seat at the table, to become a part of beloved community?

For some of us that means packing meals with FACES or working at the Habitat house next month, for others it means passing out COVID 19 safety packets or volunteering with Farmville Cares. Others of us model this loving relationship in classrooms and businesses every day as we live out our faith through our vocations. What might it mean for us to live more fully into these God-given opportunities for relationship and community?

In Genesis 1 we learn that as humans we are created in God's image – we are the only creatures God made that are identified that way – and we are the only part of creation deemed "very good." But the love we find in the Trinity, the communion we find with God and with one another, is not just for our own sakes. It's for the sake of the wider world that God created. It's meant to be shared and nurtured.

So today, my prayer is that the Trinity will be more than an abstract idea to us. Rather, I pray that we will listen and hear with our hearts as the Triune God, the God of community and relationship, continues to show us ways to build and share that love with all of God's wonderful creation.