

"The Dance of the Trinity." Genesis 1:1-2:4; Ps. 8; Matt. 28:16-20  
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church  
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Trinity Sunday, May 18, 2008

Today is Trinity Sunday, a day devoted to this troubling tenet of the Christian faith. We've been talking Trinity for centuries. Whenever we've tried to describe the mystery of God, Trinity keeps popping up.

What can be said about the Trinity? First things first, we do not believe in the Trinity. As Shirley Guthrie points out in his wonderful book called "Christian Doctrine" (a copy of which is in our church library, by the way), we do not believe in the Trinity. We believe in a living God, and a loving God.

When we look through the Bible, we do not find the word "trinity". It isn't mentioned. But nevertheless, it echoes through the pages of the Bible in numerous ways.

Old and New Testament writers and preachers all proclaim the unity of God. The great Shemah starts out: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, mind and strength." (Deut. 6) Jesus repeated this as the first and greatest commandment.

A belief in one God is essential to our faith.

When we call Jesus "Immanuel", meaning "God with us", we are not splitting God apart. When Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" and, "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" he is underscoring the fact that when you meet up with him you are

meeting up with God. If we want to get a good idea of what God is like, we only have to study the stories of Jesus.

So, really, the troubling doctrine of the Trinity begins with the Incarnation. As soon as God shows up in the person of Jesus Christ we either have a new song that has the line: "God in Two Persons, blessed duality", or we have Jesus as some kind of lesser deity to God the Father.

And when we try to grasp the "otherness" of God who is totally beyond our comprehension, along with the "presentness" of God who is as close as breath, the Holy Spirit comes into the picture. How else can Jesus promise to be with us "always, to the close of the age" apart from the Spirit?

When we talk about Trinity, we are talking about One God who is revealed to us in different ways throughout the Scripture. The oneness of God is not fractured by thinking in Trinitarian terms. Rather, the oneness of God is furthered when we talk about the Trinity.

Why is that? When we talk about Trinity we are talking about relationships. Relationships lie at the heart of the Trinity. The Trinity is about relationships, not about math. It is much more than "three in one and one in three". When we talk about the Trinity we are also talking about love. And love does not exist apart from relationship.

The God who chooses to create the universe and relate to the universe doesn't do so because of loneliness or boredom, but for love. The God who is born among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth doesn't do so to get a firsthand understanding of what it means to be human, as though the God who is all knowledge and

truth would need to take a field trip to find out about us. Jesus was born out of love.

This is the place where we can insert John 3:16. Why did Christ come into the world? "For God so loved the world..."

And, the God who is everywhere present as the Holy Spirit isn't here to keep an eye on us, but to comfort us and remind us that God isn't "way out there", but a very Present help in trouble.

Trinity underlines the love of God and it is forged out of the relationships that existed before all time and eternity in the total expression of God's love. It is communion. It is fellowship. It is the perfect "being-with-another" that shows us what our life together might be like if we really took seriously what it means to be made in the image of God, of the triune God.

This is critically important. It is so easy to get hung up on fine points of doctrine and facets of faith and forget the larger picture, our greater calling. If all the Christians and all the Moslems and all the Jews, not to mention persons of other faiths who nevertheless believe in the existence of a God - a living God - if we all were to affirm our faith and our belief that God is a God of peace and justice, love and freedom, what kind of difference might that make?

If we weren't so busy trying to defend God and stick up for God as though God needed us to fight his battles, what a difference that might make!

If we allowed ourselves to be caught up in the mystery of God's abiding presence, a mystery that lies at the heart of the Trinity,

again, what a difference might that make in our lives and in our relationships!

To do this kind of thinking, this kind of talking, this kind of relating to others, would be very much in keeping with the spirit of the Trinity.

In Christian art and music the Trinity is often depicted as three persons joined in a dance. In a few minutes the choir will sing an anthem titled "Come, Join the Dance of Trinity." Here is how the first verse reads:

Come, Join the dance of Trinity,  
 Before all worlds begun - -  
 The interweaving of the Three,  
 The Father, Spirit, Son,  
 The universe of space of time  
 Did not arise by chance,  
 But as the Three, in love and hope,  
 Made room within their dance.

This first verse connects very well with the *Genesis* text we heard. Creation is an act of love and hope, of God's love and hope. It is an act of hospitality, of God making room within the dance to allow the cosmos to have a place, a starting point, and a time.

Within the dance of the Trinity there is no hierarchy, no superior/inferior. God the Father isn't the head of the board of directors. Jesus isn't "God in training". The Holy Spirit isn't in charge of mission and outreach.

They are all three equal and eternal, sharing the love that binds all things together. In the Trinity we glimpse the freedom of

God to live in mutuality, respect, self-giving love and oneness of purpose and being.

The Trinity tells us that we, as humans made in God's image, are also made for relationships, for sharing love, for equality and for solidarity with one another. Just as in the Trinity, so too in our relationships there is no need for hierarchy, for self-assertion, for lording it over others. We are called to live together in the freedom of God's saving love and in the harmony and wholeness that the Trinity not only makes possible, but also points us toward as members of this living body of God's people in the world.

So, let's not be embarrassed by the Trinity or confused. Let us be amazed and awed by this mystery even as we celebrate the love of God that has reached out to us and drawn us together and brought us into fellowship and service, in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.