

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
June 19, 2011
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Worship Theme: Trinity—God’s Gracious Invitation
Genesis 1:1 - 2:4 and Matthew 28:16-20

Today is Trinity Sunday. In my preparation for this Sunday, I reviewed several commentaries and other literature. Most of them began with a statement similar to this statement from the *Feasting on the Word Commentary*: “Trinity Sunday has been the bane of preachers for generations. Senior pastors regularly dump the preaching for this Sunday on their junior associates.” When I shared this with Pastor Bob, he simply raised his hands and gave me a broad smile. So, here I am and Pastor Bob is on a Mission Trip in Tennessee with our youth group.

Since preaching the doctrine of the Trinity is so difficult for the Christian clergy, I can only imagine that our sermons on the subject must come off sounding a bit like the famous comedy skit from Abbot and Costello “Who’s on First?” I might begin like this:

When you come to church you need to know the key players . . . you know, the ones who are worthy of honor and praise.

Honor and praise huh? Well who are they?

O.K., now listen closely. There is one God.

One God. That seems easy enough. What do you call this one God?

This one God is called, "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."

Now wait just a minute. You told me that there is only one God.

That's right!

So which is it?

So which is what?

Which name do you use for this one God?

The name I gave you.

But you gave me three names.

That's right.

What's right?

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

So you have three Gods?

No, one God.

So which is it?

Which is what?

Father, Son or Holy Spirit?

Yes!

Yes to what?

That's God's name.

Which God?

Our one God.

Why did you give three names?

Because they aren't the same.

But you just told me there is one God. So which is it?

Which is what?

Which name is the name of your God?

I told you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

But that is three.

Yes, but it's only one. (*Mickey Anders, The Trinity - Dancing Sarah's Circle*)

By now, we are all shaking our head at the incomprehensibility of it all. So today, bear with me as we again delve into this mystery of God and try to find the importance of and reason why this matters to our lives today.

The early Christians experienced God in a three-fold way as is evident in many of the greetings and benedictions that bracket the Epistles. The well known end of Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, "The love of our Lord Jesus Christ, The grace of God and the communion of

the Holy Spirit be with all of you” is often the blessing used to close our worship services. Jesus’ command that we “baptize believers in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” is said at every baptism and is from the last verses of the Gospel of Matthew. These are just two of many examples in which early Christians expressed their threefold experience of God.

According to the witness of scripture, God’s love comes to us in a threefold way. We experience God as totally mysterious and *beyond us*, as Creator of all. God’s overflowing love created the world. God loved the world and gave his only begotten Son for our Salvation. We experience God as God *with us*, Immanuel; God’s Son loved the world and gave his life for the world. We experience God as God *within us*, sustaining our communities of faith. The gift of God’s love in Christ has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. The Trinity doctrine is then concerned with the truth of God and the reality of our salvation, the very message of the Gospels.

The Triune God is not only love overflowing into our lives but also in the depths of the Eternal Life. In our passage from Genesis this morning we read that in the unity of their mutual love the three persons of the trinity are the divine reality from before the earth was formed and to all eternity. In the beginning God the Father and Mother of us all, created all of creation. The spirit of God hovered and brooded over all darkness. Out of the darkness the piercing light of God shined through and the darkness could not overcome it.

There are many triads used in the Scriptures that speak of the threeness of God. Romans 11:36 reveals God as the One we worship; the One from Whom, the One through Whom and the One in Whom we offer our praise. God is known to us as Speaker, Word, and Breath. In baptism, God is for us Overflowing Font, Living Water, and Flowing River. As we are born anew by the waters and the Spirit, God is Compassionate Mother, Beloved Child, and Life-giving Womb. Each of these triads has their basis in Scripture. And each serves to help us know something of the inexhaustible mystery of God.

From another perspective, in a visual depiction of the Trinity, you may take a look at the picture in your bulletin. This Icon is one of my favorite ways of talking about the Trinity. Andrei Rublev in orthodox Moscow in the 15th century created this amazing icon of the Trinity. The painting originated in the story of Abraham and Sarah (Gen1:18) who receive and richly entertain "three men" from whom they receive God's promise of a son, in spite of Sarah's (laughably) advanced age. Some interpretations claim that the three men were "angels," while some claim that Abraham and Sarah actually met the triune God.

The icon shows the three divine persons seated at a table. In the slight inclination of their heads toward each other and the gestures of their hands, a deeper unity is suggested. A chalice on the table symbolizes the sacrifice of the Son for the redemption of the world. As you gaze on this image, do you sense the vast silence that surrounds the three figures? They seem to be looking into each other with an unqualified dignity, respect, and loving gaze—three distinct person, three, yet one. The fourth side to the table is left open intentionally by Rublev, signaling God's gracious invitation for us to sit at the table and join in the intimate conversation taking place. We complete the image by joining the divine circle of the Sacred Three.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams a wonderfully thoughtful theologian of our time describes this in another way:

Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted. The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tell us that God desires us, *as if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this; so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God. The life of the Christian community has as its rationale – if not invariably its practical reality – the task of teaching us this: so

ordering our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as an occasion of joy.

Did you catch this statement in the quote? “God desires us, *as if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response to God’s giving that God’s self makes in the life of the Trinity.” Consider this claim in light of Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:28-34). Just as “God loves us as God loves God,” each of us is called to love our neighbor *as if our neighbor were our self*. Do you begin to get a sense of our connectedness not only with the Trinity but with one another?

The bold assertion of Trinitarian theology is that God holds us to the same standard that God holds God’s self. And the good news is that the God who holds us to this incredibly high standard also loves us, *as if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response between the Lover, Beloved, and Love – between the Mother, Child, and Womb—between Father, Son, and Spirit that is the inner life of God. We have come to call that dynamic, generous, interpenetrating *inner life of God* the Trinity.

That’s a heavy theological statement, but I invite you to spend some time considering the profound implications of it. Let me also try to phrase it another way. **God loves us as if we were God; therefore, God invites us to love other humans beings in the same way that we are loved by God – that is, by loving our neighbors as our very selves.** This is the deep meaning for us behind Jesus’ claim that the greatest commandments are to love God with our whole selves and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is what it means to be made in the image of God. And we begin by saying “Yes” to God’s gracious invitation to participate in the very life of the Trinity.

So, where might this affirmative response take us? If we can begin to dream about our place in this interconnected universe, we can find wonderful inspiration and motivation for ministry, for community and for worship. What might it mean if we begin to identify ourselves by our Oneness in God, rather than our individualism or alienation? What might it mean to view the local church as just one manifestation of a radically interconnected life of God? What

might ministry become if we were motivated and guided by the ways we are connected to those we are trying to reach, rather than focusing on how 'they' are different from 'us'?

When we begin to recognize that we share in the community within the Trinity, we find a home, and are also led into a radical openness and hospitality to others. When we baptize new believers, the church along with God is again extending this gracious invitation for others to participate in the life of the Triune God. When we begin to experience the grace of Christ, love of God and presence of the Spirit working in us and through us, we start asking new questions, praying new prayers, singing new songs and initiating new actions. How might we be able to take this Sunday's celebration of this creative connectedness, and begin a time of dreaming up new ways that our community can share in the overflowing love of God? How will we continue to say "yes" to God's gracious invitation? In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.