

Matthew 28.16-20 Trinity A 2020

Happy Trinity Sunday! We've now celebrated the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, from Advent through Pentecost. Today is the culmination of all that, and after today we will move into the really tough part – spending the next six months figuring out what Jesus was teaching and showing us about how to live in love towards one another. Something we obviously haven't understood yet.

Trinity wasn't observed in the Western Church until 1334. Many were reluctant to make it a specific feast as it can so easily be misinterpreted. There are more 'heresies' in trying to explain it than I can possibly remember. And – it is also true that I don't *want* to remember them. The trinity is difficult to make sense of, especially in our post-modern scientific age.

Because of its placement in the church lectionary cycle, some interpret the trinity as the culmination of a sequence in time from creation, to the birth of Jesus, through his death and ascension, then the giving of the Holy Spirit. So we are assuming that the trinity moves through time. That isn't quite it, though, because God is eternal.

John especially describes this idea for us. The Spirit and the Word – Jesus – were present with God at creation. The doctrine of the Trinity is not God describing Godself; rather, it is humans trying to understand God.

The trinity is hinted at many places in scripture. Matthew's Jesus is specific in having a formula by which we can expansively spread the news – immerse them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It needs to be said, however, that the authors of the New Testament did not have a developed Trinitarian theology. But ever since then, Christian theologians have sought to understand the nature and purpose of God by the idea of the Trinity.

It's not three masks or modes of being or three separate divinities,
but one God in three persons – and it opens up a sense of complexity within God's being.

Much has been written about this,
but I've found myself especially attracted to the idea of a social Trinity.
Rather than God as singular and simple -- impenetrable, incapable of change or suffering,
for me Trinity suggests that God from eternity is relational;
between the Father and Son, there was, is, and always will be mutual self-giving.

A very wise man said: Knowing the Trinity is being involved in a circling movement:
We are drawn by the Son towards the Father,
drawn into the Father's breathing-out of the Spirit
so that the Sons' life may be again made real in the world.
It is where contemplation and action become inseparable.
There is unity of purpose, of action, of love.

It's about God's inner being. It is the nature of God,
and it is what enables us to be gathered into the work of God.
We are drawn into the inner relationship that is God,
and thereby experience salvation, healing, wholeness, reconciliation.

We are transformed by our encounter with the God who is love,
who is revealed to us in the person of Jesus – the Logos of God –
and is present with us through the Holy Spirit. One God, mother of us all.

Our calling, our commission, then, is to draw others into this relationship.
Hopefully, it won't be too much longer until we can re-enter our world.
And then, we will once again know that God draws humanity into God's self,
transforming all – and this is a task that transcends time as we know it.
And -- the promise is there: Jesus will be present with us and to us to the end of the age.

All of this might sound good, but what does this look like when it is actually lived out?
Does it have to be in far-away mission trips?
Does it have to ignore our current safety standards of masks and social distancing?

Years ago at General Seminary, Desmond Tutu came to the opening of the Center named for him there.

His health wasn't great, and he had a large handler with him.

The bishop looked at me, and I started to move towards him to say hello, but that handler stepped towards me. He said: The bishop is busy.

I turned away, a bit embarrassed.

Then I heard small but firm voice: "Come, come."

I approached the Bishop, and he smiled and said, "Tell me your name."

I did, and he said, "And tell me about yourself."

For the next ten minutes, I received his full and complete attention.

For that time, I knew I was someone of infinite value.

As I turned to leave, the bishop looked me in the eye and quietly said,

I will remember you.

I felt beloved. God's Beloved. Part of the Trinity dance of relationship, and of love.

The Creator, the Eternal Word who came to us, and the Spirit who is with us always.

"I am with you always, to the end of the age."

God, Word, and Wisdom filling us and calling us into relationship with the Almighty.

It takes my breath away.

In the end, I still can't explain the Trinity, how One God is Three and Three are One; it will remain a paradox, a mystery flirting with comprehension.

Nonetheless I know we can be drawn into that wonderful dance,

that relationship in and with God, and we can be moved

by that power of the One who made us, redeemed and calls us to holiness. AMEN