

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
June 7, 2020- Trinity Sunday (A)
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater

Gen 1:1-2:4; Psalm 8; 2 Cor 13: 11-13; Matt 28: 16-20

† **“Agree with one another, live in peace; The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Cor 13.13). Amen.**

Every year, on the Sunday following the close of the Easter season, on the Sunday after Pentecost, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Trinity. This is a particularly important day. For today, we acknowledge one of the most complex and unique aspects of the Christian faith— whether one is Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox—the belief of one God in three persons... perhaps the most sublime and difficult concept of our faith.

Today the Church bids me to give a sermon, rather than a homily, which reflects mostly on the scriptures for the day. I am to give a sermon, that is “a statement of doctrinal truth given in an engaging manner.” So...

The doctrine of the Trinity says, God is One, eternal and before time... God reveals God's self in three persons, all equal in majesty and splendor—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And... the Father is in the Son and Holy Spirit, yet the Father is not the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son... but they are co-equal. Pretty complicated sounding theology, huh? Of course there are more simple explanations of the Trinity. That by St. Augustine: of the tree, with roots made of wood, the trunk made of wood, the branches made of wood; all are wood, one substance, but three entities. Or similarly, by St. Patrick: of the three-leafed clover, three closely united parts all belonging to one single leaf... one entity, one clover. And yet, these still don't express the complexity of God.

Frankly, I'm not smart enough to explain it, and none of us is smart enough to understand it... it's a mystery! So I'll just say, the Church believes in the Trinity, I believe in the Trinity, and you should believe in the Trinity. Sermon's done!

You see, the doctrine of the Trinity is so hard to grasp because it's the Church's effort (that is, a human effort) to give coherent expression to the mystery of who God is... To try to explain God's free grace and love announced in the Scriptures and experienced by faithful Christians throughout history. This week, I couldn't help but wonder, with all the chaos going on in our nation... Does it really matter to most human beings that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Why does any of this stuff matter? What if we don't buy it? What if we have doubt?

Interestingly, today's Gospel reveals that even the disciples had doubt. 'When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.' It makes me feel better— like I'm in good company—knowing that the disciples also doubted. What's even better is Jesus' reassurance to them in this passage, even if you don't believe it, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Giving them reassurance of an ongoing

relationship, full of love and compassion. To me, this is a key to understanding the Trinity, understanding it as the relationship of our God in three persons.

For those of us who are of the Anglican tradition, which is both Catholic and Protestant, we tend to focus on our experiential awareness of the incarnational God, Jesus. We believe God has been and continues to be with us on this earth, promoting the values Jesus taught of love, justice, and compassion. And we believe that all the acts of the Triune God in the world, past, present, or future, are indivisible among the three persons. God the Father does not act alone in creation, God the Son does not act alone in redemption, God the Spirit does not act alone in the work of calling and sanctifying God's people. All three work together. This social aspect of the Trinity—3 coequal persons at work together—is the ultimate example of what it means to be in relationship.... and to live as a community. God's love for the world is self-giving and humble... it is not self-seeking or coercive, but persuasive and compassionate. God's love promotes true relationship, a connection based on freedom, support, and maturity.

In today's passage from Genesis, we are told that we are created in the image of the Triune God: 'God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.' Of course, none of us is perfect... all our lives have involved *a web of relationships*, some of them strong and some of them strained... some have been very close and some quite distant... some of our relationships are intact while others are broken. And the same is true of the relationships within church communities, like St. Mark's, and in communities across the United States. This is the situation 2nd Corinthians was addressing in the early Church. And it is especially relevant to all of us today— some relationships are strong... some are strained... some are broken. And still, we are called to live in *the image of God*. The Trinity is all about being in community— a community of sharing, of support, and of mutual love— and we are invited to be a part of that community, for we were created in that image!

Our Presiding Bishop reminded us this week that "God is Love, and we were taught by Jesus to 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" As a nation, we must pray for our leaders to help all of us to follow the values of love, of justice, of compassion, and of healing... that we may be "one nation under God with liberty and justice for all."

Perhaps the glory and the gift of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, is that it helps us to realize that the One who was, before his birth on this earth, is here now and always will be, with the Father and the Spirit... and they are with each of us and in this community, as long as we believe and have faith. Yes, you should believe in the Holy Trinity... and believe in the love, the work, and the everlasting presence of God in yourself, and in those whom you are called to love.

"Live in peace... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor 13.13).

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