Trinity Sunday June 11, 2017

All Saints’ Church Year A

Genesis 1:1-2:4a 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Psalm 8 Matthew 28:16-20

Today is Trinity Sunday. A day of worship to honor one of our most revered insights into our faith- and it’s also one of the most confusing!

Meister Eckhart, the 14th century German mystic describes the Trinity in a poem:

God the Father, laughed, and the Son was born.

Then the two of them laughed, and the Spirit was born.

When all three laughed, the human being was born.

What I love about his poem is the way the Idea of the Trinity embraces both Time and Eternity. Holy laughter and love are at the heart of the universe, which is expressed by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, captured in the real Time of birthing.

We can all think of illustrations of God giving birth to the world, parting the Red Sea, delivering the Ten Commandments to Moses; or Jesus born in a stable, healing the sick and forgiving sins; or the tongues of fire giving voice to the timid and birth to the church.

Our biblical stories have people and places and events attached to them. In our imagination, we see color and movement and change. There are hands and feet. Even God is hanging out in paradise looking for Adam. Things happen. People live and die. Actions matter. Deliverance is real.

Yet it’s when the three laugh together, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are there, at the beginning of creation, and then, and only then, is the human being born. The gift of life given to all, by just a Word, by those Three who transcend time, because neither God, nor the Christ, nor the Holy Spirit were ever born, and together they become the Unmoved Mover. The Initiator. The Ancient Heart of all creation.

Our very birth is dependent on the Trinity that was always an Always, never tied down in the messiness of living, and yet we are fully captured in the messiness of real time, with real people, with real ancestors, with a real destiny. And yet, that’s not all who are, because we also believe we are eternal.

Trinity Sunday celebrates our sacred understanding of being both mortal and eternal, with a beginning and an end…… and an always.

If that is true, if we are eternal Spirit, which by definition knows no time, then we were there at creation as well, brooding over the face of the waters, anticipating the Word, “Let there be light…… Let us make humankind in our image.”

We were there at creation… and not just by being born.

Understanding who we are as both eternal and mortal is really not that different than understanding that Jesus is both fully man and fully God. By now your head should be hurting. None of this is easy. Who really gets this Trinity stuff? Let’s leave all this in the hands of the theologians.

And yet, the idea of the Trinity is really important, key to our faith. So please, hang in here with me.

We begin in the wrong place. We talk about the One God, Unity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost as three divine persons in one Godhead. Often depicted as a Triangle.

I remember very well my catechism teacher, Sister Ann, (in second grade) teaching me that the idea of the Trinity was like water which came in three forms: liquid, steam and ice…. All three distinct, yet all make up one substance, one essence, one nature. This works in describing the nature of water, and it worked for a while in describing the Trinity, but I found it lacking when trying to understand who God was for me, for the world, and for creation.

At the risk of sounding heretical, I’m going to repeat myself: I think we begin in the wrong place. Don’t begin with God as One; begin with the Three. And not as three distinct “persons”. It’s not about the “persons” but rather the synergistic energy created between the three, with movement back and forth, energy “zinging,” making a dynamic relationship, which is existing between the Three, with us smack in the middle.

Describing God as One is limiting…. It’s too static, with boundaries. God is not a Being, either. Again that is trapping God into something we think we can define- an “entity.” Rather I like to think of God as a verb- within the action of mutuality, being relational, expressive, as energy, dynamism, providing, pursuing, delivering, interacting, connecting, moving, and creating. The Mystics tell us that God is now and never and forever, just to mess a bit with our minds.

God is beyond our grasp and as close to us as our jugular vein. God is love, freedom, forgiveness.

God’s power is not self-possessive or self-preserving, but rather self-giving. Look to Jesus, who does not protect his own life, when the powers-to-be threaten to kill him, but rather loves us literally into his death, showing us that the power of God is all about sustaining our lives, no matter the circumstances.

Richard Rohr, one of my favorite theologians, writes that we need to stop defining the Trinity in rational terms… rather we need to experience the Flow between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He writes his own poem:

“Big Life is happening in you (that’s the Holy Spirit).

Yet beyond you, (that’s the Creator).

And also ***as*** you (that’s the Christ).”

And what’s our response to all this? To see the Trinity not as a thing or entity, but as an invitation. And like Mary, to say Yes to the Great Mystery of surrendering ourselves to Divine Generosity. [[1]](#footnote-1)

My sister in a few months is about to be commissioned as a chaplain in the Lutheran church. She’s had an amazing journey. Twenty years ago, she was an accomplished photographer and war correspondent. She was married to an Italian, owned a home just outside Florence, and traveled all over the world. It all seemed quite glamorous to me.

She was in South Africa, on assignment, and her life was far from glamorous. Her marriage was falling apart, she hated her work, she was lonely and depressed, eating and drinking and smoking too much, and one night she fell to her knees and prayed to a God she didn’t believe in.

“Help me; I don’t know what to do; I’m a mess; I’m falling apart.”

And she heard a voice, “Go home. Go home to your parents.”

She thought someone was in the room, the voice was so clear. She turned around, even looked under the bed. “Go home.” Nothing had ever been so real.

And home she went, to heal, to face the truth, to see the hurt, to accept help, to lean into trusting, into her own vulnerability, into the unknown.

Faith is the Real Deal….. the Trinity is an expression of God’s Divine Generosity of relationship. Your heart has been given to you, and it needs to be handed on. Your life is not about you; you are about Life.

Living is saying, Yes, just as Mary said Yes; this is the Holy Kiss we give each other.

AMEN.

1. See Richard Rohr, *A Spring Within Us,* from the Center for Action and Contemplation, 2016, for a more detailed discussion on this concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)