

Rev. Sarah Carver

Trinity Sunday

On this Trinity Sunday, let me remind you that naming of the three persons of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the Trinity does not appear in scripture as such; rather, there are places where the three persons are mentioned and here in our texts this morning, we see a couple of examples of the clearest naming of God whom we now refer to as the Trinity. Here, at the end of Matthew, Jesus is commissioning his disciples as he is about to leave them, and in doing so commands them to go out and make more disciples and to initiate those disciples into the Church by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit which we continue to do to this day. In fact, a baptism isn't considered valid unless the Trinity is invoked. You see, the Trinity is a big deal, it is central to our belief as Christians because it matters how we understand God. You'll notice how the Nicene Creed goes to great length to explain how God is one and yet is also more. As Christianity became defined from its original Judaism, it had to define what it believed and the Trinity was a topic of great interest and plenty of drama. But, to see God as one and yet as these three persons is a gift rather than a kind of abstract theological exercise to test the faith of believers. There are important insights we can take away from seeing God in this way. And I think the biggest take away is that to see God as the Trinity is to see God as fundamentally relationship.

Yesterday we celebrated a marriage anniversary here at St. Peter's...we celebrated a marriage that has lasted many, many years. That alone is a big deal. But it is also true that marriage is held up in the Church as the relationship meant most to mirror the love Christ has for the Church: loving, selfless, self-giving, enduring, truthful, hopeful, faithful. But this isn't to write off any of the other kinds of relationships people can have, because all relationships are sacred, or rather, are called to be sacred--set apart for holiness. All of our relationships are meant to be a big deal. The whole of scripture is about how people are either relating well to one another and God, or how they aren't. And relationships are central to who we are. Think about it, for any of you who have been a part of any kind of relationship that has some miles on it, and that is all of us, you will notice that we leave evidence of that relationship on one another. By being with each other we form one another. Think about the person who has had the most positive influence in your life. Would you be the same person without them? If they weren't there how would you be different? How have your relationships shaped your life, your sense of who you are? In our relationships we can leave signs of love and tenderness on the very souls of one another. And, at the same time, we can leave scars, and trauma. All of these things shape who we are and all of us usually carry some combination of both. But we cannot be fully human without one another, we cannot be fully whole without connection. Children raised in Romanian orphanages in the 80's and 90's showed the world what happens when children are denied stable, loving and stimulating environments and caregivers. As adults these children would struggle with social, emotional and

cognitive issues because the care they needed to lay the groundwork to help them grow into healthy adults was never given to them.¹ They were denied the needed relationships that show us how to love one another, how to think, how to feel, how to be us. We are who we are in part because of the people around us. We tend to think of ourselves as discreet, isolated units of being that interact with one another as these same isolated units of life, like Billard balls bumping into each other on a pool table. But that isn't accurate, rather we should see ourselves as beings made up of the DNA, interactions, and experiences we have in our lifetime that intersect and are shaped by the same DNA, interactions, and experiences that are brought to us by every other person we meet. We are an orchestra of life within our beings, meeting with the same in every person. Our essential self is given to us by these limitless variables.

The Trinity is an understanding of God as the ultimate relationship—a relationship that is perfect in that there are no scars left on any person of the Trinity or on us. James Alison, Roman Catholic Theologian writes about the Trinity in the context of our broken world marked by sin. For Alison, human relationships are malformed in that we imitate one another out of desire for the things that we each want. And this imitation leads to us learning to see ourselves as alienated from one another, we form identities in opposition to each other, we compete with one another and violence becomes a tool with which we relate to one another. But the Trinity is not trapped by the same. There is no desire outside of the Father, no competition within the Trinity. As Alison writes: The Father is unoriginated love, pure giving. There is no other that is anterior to Him. All desire originates in the Father, all love. Beyond all competition.”² And the interaction, as Alison posits, the relationship that exists between the persons of the Trinity is this giving and reciprocating the unoriginated love that begins with the Father. That the Son is the perfect likeness of the Father and receives that love given by the Father and returns it perfectly at the same time, imitating the giving and receiving of this divine love.³ That the Son's whole identity is found in the Father, is received from the Father, and that same love is returned, without corruption. In return the Father imitates the Son in the same way, with the Spirit, the Trinity is constituted by this constant movement of love.

So, the Trinity is relationship, not just in relationship. And so perfectly in sync that there is no beginning or ending, just being. And out of that relationship, like all relationships, came everything in creation. Love, in the form of creativity is the result of this perichoresis, or dance of the divine. And what is more, the Trinity remains open to all The Trinity creates, it is not closed off to what its love touches and forms. We all know those people in the kind of relationships that don't have room for others to enter in. But that is not so with God. We are meant to be a part of this dance, to be a part of this giving and receiving of perfect love, to receiving the likeness of God and put it on perfectly as the Son does. There is this famous icon of the Trinity where each person looks just like the other, but they are dressed uniquely. However,

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-39055704>

² Alison, James. *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*. Pg 51.

³ Ibid.

each wears some kind of blue garment and all are seated around a table. But there is a space at that table, room for another person to join at this heavenly banquet. And that space is there for us, a place for us to join God, to be gathered to God at the table a symbol of belonging and home.

And so we continue on our journey to seeking to find ourselves in God, to seeking to perfect the love we share with one another, learning to receive it from God who gives love completely, and in that journey to let God transform us further and further into the likeness of God, further into the being from whom we originated. Just like the best people in our lives have helped shape us to be the people we are, we are to learn to join into the dance of the Trinity, matching the tempo, allowing our lives to take on the same movements, letting the Spirit lead us into the sacred circle of divinity and all of creation. And in doing so, we leave behind our worldly identities that are malformed by misplaced desire and violence, alienation and competition, and learn to see ourselves anew, found in the eternal and surging love of the Trinity who is love in constant motion, reaching out to us and welcoming us home. Amen.