

Trinity Sunday, Year A, 061514, mcr
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of the One God, Wisdom, Grace and Love. Amen.

Yes, it's that time again...Trinity Sunday...always the first Sunday after Pentecost...the only Sunday in our liturgical calendar that celebrates a Doctrine. And if there's one doctrine of the Church that nobody understands very well...if at all...it's the Doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity, formulated in the 3rd Century, concerns "the one God exist[ing] in three Persons and one substance, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

The word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible.

It is said that if one preaches for longer than 30 seconds on the Trinity, she or he is sure to commit at least 7 heresies.

So what are we doing here? What is this Trinity thing all about?

Lots of scholars and some not-so-scholarly folks have weighed in on this strange idea. Like the timeless theological question, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?", the discussion around this elusive idea has been going on for centuries, and there is no one set-in-stone definition for it. The best we can do is create metaphors and analogies that capture our imaginations.

The Trinity is for us something like the roundness of the earth. We accept that the earth is round, but on a day-to-day basis we tend not to experience that way. Most of the time we behave as though the earth were flat. To experience the earth as round requires us to have a larger perspective. We need to look at a globe, or see a photo of our planet taken from space, or even go out into space ourselves. Otherwise, the earth is so large, and we are so small, that we cannot deeply appreciate the true shape of this planet.

To experience the truth of the Trinity, we need the equivalent of a globe, or a satellite photo, or a trip into space. The main problem, of course, with trying to explain the Trinity, is that technical, theological definitions are inadequate for

describing a relationship. We require something more than technical language, the symphony of words that through the centuries the church has constructed in response to the self-disclosure of God. Yes, we need these words because they set forth the truth with accuracy and precision; yet we also need an image, something that can engage the heart.

Sometimes, however, even the words that we use to get past the technical are often inadequate. For example, look at the words "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" - There's 'Father': well, that's ok but some people want more than an image of a fatherly or even grandfatherly man with a long white beard. 'Mother' makes a whole other group of people uncomfortable. 'Parent' sounds sort of clinical, but would someone who came from an abusive home want to think of God as a parent who is unkind and hurtful, no matter what their gender?

Then there's 'Son': surely the most understandable image, in relation to the image of God as a parent. And, of course, we have the whole nativity story to go along with that.

And the third 'person' - Holy Ghost: what's up with that? Who picked the word 'ghost' and why? Spirit makes more sense, but how does it fit with the other two in this analogy who are meant to be embodied?

So there are other analogies to use:

Lover, Beloved and the Love shared between them

Someone has suggested, for those who think on the math side of the brain: you can say that $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$, but with God you don't add, you multiply, and $1 \times 1 \times 1$ is still one.

New for me is: The One who creates us in love. The One who liberates us to love everyone. And the One who sends us into the world as instruments of that Love.

Some of those may speak to you. Some may not. We are human beings, after all, and we can only use what we know to describe something that is so much greater than we can ever know completely.

There's an image that speaks to me that comes from the same 3rd century discussion I mentioned earlier. I've talked about it before in previous Trinity sermons, but I think it bear repeating. The Greeks used a term (*perichoresis* - περιχώρησις), to define that relationship. It is the root of many common English words, for instance,

chorus and choir. It is also the root word of the word carol, which means to dance in a circle. Dancing is part of human nature. Perhaps it is inborn. If you doubt me, watch little children as they play.

The ancient ones of the Church who decided this was an important concept to argue about, described the Trinity as a dance...a dance with three partners dancing together. This is not ballroom, or rock and roll, or even square dancing. Instead it is a circle dance - Father, Son, and Spirit with hands clasped in a circle, engaged in that dance that is their life together, a dance without beginning and without end.

In this holy dance called Trinity, the partners do not predate the dance, nor does the dance predate the partners; but both the partners and the dance are eternal. In this holy dance called Trinity each partner cannot be confused with the others, nor is one partner of greater worth than another. Instead, each partner plays a specific role, and the three of them move in rhythm, showing the utmost courtesy and affection and grace.

The music of the dance is the same music that made the stars, the sea breezes, and the pulsing world inside atoms. It is the music that made us, and that we can hear during celebrations and silences and even during tragedy when we know that life waits for us again. It is unceasing, just like the dance. It is the rhythm of the Trinity.

We hear this music also during the hours of dark tragedy, when the ordinary supports of life have been knocked out from under us, and we feel out of place and without purpose, yet we know that beyond our current death, life awaits us again. The music we hear is unceasing: it is the rhythm of the Trinity.

From Advent until now, our focus has been largely on major events in the story of Jesus. The point of the story of Jesus is this: all of us are invited to join in the dance. From now - the season of 'Ordinary Time' - until Advent comes again, our focus is largely on what Jesus taught by word and action. And the point of Jesus' teaching is this: all of us are invited to join in the dance.

The Trinity is an unending, joyous dance, but the miracle is that the circle breaks open, and the Son and the Spirit, still holding fast to the hands of the Father, reach out their other hands to invite us into the circle, to invite us to dance, to become their partners, participants in their life.

When you go to wedding receptions and watch the dancers, you'll see that they show different degrees of ability. Some glide along with flawless form. Others move with small, timid steps. A few of them are downright clumsy. What is sad, though, is not a dancer who lacks skill, but the many who never get up at all, people who could dance but decide they will not.

Our life works the same way. There's a dance going on. That dance is the living God, the holy Trinity. We are invited to join that dance, to be in relationship with those who are dancing. The Spirit is eager to help us move. The Son reaches out his wounded hand. The Father wants us to see his face.

Nothing should hold us back from accepting that invitation, from being in that relationship. It doesn't matter if we are bad dancers; it matters if we choose not to dance at all. What matters is that we take a risk, that we get up and go out on the floor, that we join the circle and move to the music, the rhythm of the Trinity. No matter what words we use to describe or explain the Trinity, the important thing to remember is that this doctrine is about community. Those three persons - the community of the Trinity - that community creates and redeems and blesses each and every one of us so that we can be part of the community as well. We've all been invited. There will be no outcasts, no outsiders.

Can you hear it? Can you feel it? The rhythm of the Trinity. It's got a great beat. You can dance to it!