

Sunday, June 12, 2022

Trinity Sunday (Year C)

The Rev. Michael K. Fincher

Service Live Streamed at:

<https://www.facebook.com/stgregoryslongbeach/videos/1637692023281283>

(Sermon begins at about 17:30)

“Invited Into the Work of the Trinity”

Early in my life as a priest, when Trinity Sunday inevitably rolled around, I felt that I had to provide some sort of explanation of the Trinity. What it is and how it operates. Which, inevitably proves to be an exercise in futility, as we just cannot understand the “new math” involved when it comes to the Trinity: Three in One and One in Three. That our one and only God is comprised of three “persons”: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And that, despite being manifest as three “persons,” as three unique entities, they are each comprised of the same substance and nature, making each “person” fully and completely God. All three “persons” being our One God. Three in One and One in Three. It’s enough to make your head hurt. And if your head hurts trying to sort all that out, just imagine how much my head hurts trying to come up with new ways to explain the doctrine of the Trinity every year.

While we have this doctrine that says our God is manifest in three “persons,” and we know from Scripture and more specifically from the teachings of Jesus, the one “person” of the Trinity who had human form, we also know that the intricacies of the Trinity—how Three can be One and One can be Three, how the Three interrelate—is a mystery. Mystery with a capital “M.” We humans just do not have the capacity to fully comprehend it all. Even though theologians have been trying for two millennia to do so. In reality, the best we can hope for, the best we can do, is experience the Trinity in whatever ways the “persons” of the Trinity chose to manifest themselves in our daily lives and ministries.

As my own thinking and experience, not only of the Trinity, but also of preaching about the Trinity, has changed and evolved over time, I realize that attempts to explain the Trinity are not only impossible, they are probably not really that helpful. Unless you are a theology geek and derive enjoyment from such esoteric mental gymnastics. What is probably more helpful, and maybe the best we can hope for, is to look to the Trinity as an icon for the Christian life. As an image that serves as a window into the sacred realm, providing glimpses of the Divine and our relationship with God. To look at the Trinity as a window into, as a potential model for, what it means to be a Christian and how we are to live into the fullness of what that means.

Thankfully, we do not have to go back to the drawing board to develop new images for how to look at the Trinity. There is already something about the Trinity that is inherent to the very nature of each “person” of the Trinity and to the Trinity as a whole. Something that we all have access to, as well. And that is Love. You don’t have to look very hard in Scripture to see this. Particularly in the Gospels and Epistles. There we find numerous passages talking about God’s love as manifest through creation, in the Incarnation, and in the Holy Spirit. It is not just the qualities of love that are expressed through each of these “persons” of the Trinity. The relationship, the interrelationship, between the three is characterized by love. The three

“persons” of the Trinity are bound together in love. They operate out of that love. And they reveal themselves through love.

Professor Heidi Russell, in her book *The Source of All Love*, writes that “The primary analogy for God as Trinity . . . is Source of Love, Word of Love, and Spirit of Love. God the Father is the Unoriginate Source of Love, simply meaning the ultimate source, the source that has no origin itself because it is the origin of all love that exists.”¹ As we read in the creation story in Genesis, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth . . .” (Gen 1.1). That God existed before anything else was created. Making God the source of all that exists. Not just the material stuff, but EVERYTHING that exists. And while love is not a material substance, we know from our own experiences that love does indeed exist. We have all experienced love. The love of a parent. The love of a friend. The love of an intimate partner. No one would deny that love exists. And it had to come from somewhere. And so while Scripture does not specifically say that God the Father created love, it is the underlying premise of Scripture and indeed, of Creation itself. That God created all that is out of love. That the act of Creation and Creation itself is a tangible representation of love. That God’s actions throughout salvation history as recorded in Scripture is out of love for humanity, in an ongoing attempt to be in relationship with humanity.

Of course, we know from Scripture that did not always go so well. Not for lack of trying on God’s part. But because of failings on our part. But the Father loved humanity so much that he found a way around the barriers to that love that we put up. Russell goes on to note “That Source of all love has been revealed in the Word of Love. The world was created in and through that Word of Love, and that Word of Love has been spoken into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.”² That one of the most tangible ways that God expresses love for humanity was through the Incarnation. Through the Word made flesh. By coming to dwell among us in human form, in the form of Jesus.

But the expression of God’s love through the Word of Love, through Jesus, did not stop there. Sure, that was huge in and of itself. That God took on the vulnerability of humanity just to be with us. That through Jesus, God faced everything that we humans face. Including temptation, the specter of sin, illness, infirmity, even death. But in doing so, Jesus, the Word of Love, not only faced those things. Through his own suffering and death, he took on those things and defeated them. Redeeming them. Transforming darkness into light. Transforming death into life. All out of love for us.

But God’s love was so great, so expansive, so unbounded, that it could not be limited to expression through the person of Jesus. For in providing the ultimate act of love—Christ’s selfless sacrifice of himself for our sake—he could not be physically present in an ongoing way. Some other means was needed to insure that God’s unbounded love continued to be shared with humanity. Russell continues, “The Source of Love is also continually enacted in the Spirit of Love, which is present in the world and active in the heart of all believers forming the Christian community into the body of Christ.”³ That the Spirit has been given to us at Pentecost and through our baptisms, to be an ongoing presence in our lives. To guide us, to inspire us, to support us, in our work as the Body of Christ in the world. To be an ongoing reminder of God’s love for us. To be a continual outpouring of God’s love for us.

But God's love does not stop there. Russell notes that, "As the body of Christ, this community is then called to be the ongoing presence of God as Love in the world."⁴ That God's love is not given to us to hold on to. Rather, God shares his love with us, the love that is manifest through Creation, through Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit, with the intent that we share that love with others. That we become conduits of God's love—the means by which God's love is spread throughout the world.

Professor Russell casts the Trinity as Love itself. With a capital L. And that love is expressed through the Source of Love, the Word of Love, and the Spirit of Love. Through the unique persons and actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all operating through humanity, through each and every one of us, to make that unbounded love known in the world. To make that unbounded love felt in the world.

If the Trinity is Love and the sharing and manifestation of that Love in its many forms is the work of the "persons" of the Trinity, then what Russell lays out makes it clear that we have a critical part to play in the workings of the Trinity, as well. Brother Curtis Almquist, of the Society of St. John the Evangelist expresses this beautifully: "Imagine God as Trinity, and then go one step further. Try imagining a fourth person. We are the fourth person in the circle, a circle of belonging and love. That is how much God loves us. That is how much we all belong, we who have been created in the very image and likeness of God."⁵

Genesis tells us that we are indeed created in the image and likeness of God. That means that we inherently have some of the same qualities as God. No, we are not all-powerful deities like our God. But it is clear that God is Love. That God seeks to share his love with us in many ways. Most notably through different manifestations of Godself—through God the Father in the act of Creation; through God the Son through his death and resurrection, through his defeating of sin and death, and through the resulting salvation and new life provided to us; and through the Holy Spirit as an ongoing presence in our lives. All showing aspects of God's love. All showing the love that exists between the "persons" of the Trinity. All showing the Love that is central to the Trinity. All given for us out of that same love.

The doctrine of the Trinity may be difficult to explain. But, if we resist the temptation to try to overthink it or to try to provide unsatisfactory explanations for the unexplainable, we recognize that, "In the end, the doctrine of the Trinity is about a God who is living and active in our lives: creating and recreating, teaching and guiding, refining and empowering."⁶ All of which is relational. Relationship between the "persons" of the Trinity. But more importantly, grounded in relationship with us as God's beloveds. If God is Love, we, too, made in the image and likeness of God, are also manifestations of God's love, which is expressed in its utmost through the Trinity. And, being made in the image and likeness of God, we are invited into the work of the Trinity. To be sources of God's love, to proclaim the message of God's love, and to live in the spirit of God's love. That it is through us that the essence of the Trinity is revealed.

¹ Richard Rohr, “The Trinity as Love,” Center for Action and Contemplation, January 13, 2021. <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-trinity-as-love-2022-01-13/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Curtis Almquist, “Brother Give Us a Word” email, June 10, 2022.

⁶ Threefold Life: SALT’s Lectionary Commentary for Trinity Sunday, SALT, June 6, 2022. <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2019/6/10/threefold-life-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-trinity-sunday>.