

**TRINITARIAN LIVES**  
Sermon Presented to St. Paul's Church  
Trinity Sunday, Matt. 28:16-20, Year A  
June 11, 2017  
Thack Dyson

Happy Trinity Sunday! Are you doing anything special to celebrate this major Feast Day of the Church? Seriously, Trinity is one of our major Feast Days, but much like the Ascension, it is generally overlooked in the Church year. This could be because the Trinity is also one of the more misunderstood doctrines in the Church. In fact, the doctrine has confounded theologians and the laity alike since the concept was first considered.

There is an old legend about Saint Augustine that points to the Trinity's complexity. Augustine wrote a seminal theological dissertation on the Trinity entitled *De Trinitate*. This was not something he penned one afternoon before moving onto something else. No, he wrestled with the subject for quite a while before arriving at his conclusions. According to the legend, he was pondering the Trinity while walking along the sea coast and observed a young boy filling up a bucket with seawater and pouring it into a hole he had dug in the sand. He asked the boy what he was doing to which the boy responded, "I'm emptying the ocean into this hole." Augustine replied, "Don't you realize that what you are doing is impossible?" The young boy said, "It may be, but it is no more impossible than you trying to define the Trinity."

Yes, the Trinity has challenged greater minds than mine over the centuries. However, today we are not going to talk about the various theological positions on the subject, but instead focus on its practical application to us in the here and now. But first, I would like to tell you a short story to puts the doctrine into perspective.

Ann Weems was a Christian poet and lecturer from the South who happened to be in Wisconsin leading a parish retreat. Before supper on the first night, a man with a Southern

accent came up to her and asked, “Where are you from?” When she said, “I’m from Nashville,” he smiled and said, “I thought so. Who are your people?” Upon hearing that phrase, “Who are your people,” a flood of memories swept over her. She immediately recalled familiar faces of friends and relatives from the past, and even smelled aromas associated with home.

She answered that question by saying, “My father is Tom Barr.” Immediately his face lit up with a look of recognition. He told all the people around him, “Hey, she’s one of us. She’s Tom Barr’s daughter.” And they gathered around her and led her to the table, talking about people they knew twenty-five years ago in Nashville. Ann comments, “We dashed back in time and it felt right. I belonged. I was accepted. All because I knew who my people are.”<sup>1</sup>

Ann Weems' experience points to the importance of relationships. To put it simply, to be whole, people need relationships. To be whole, people need to have someone in their lives. Think of the most satisfying moments of your life. Now think deeply: like the time you sat on your grandmother’s lap and she told you that you were a “special child”; or when you first fell in love and knew that you were the object of someone’s affection; or when you were held, when you were hugged, when you were embraced, when you were loved, when you were affirmed, or when you were simply in the silent presence of someone who loved you. For most of us, these have to be some of the most satisfying times in our lives.

By the same token, think of the worst moments in your life: those times when you were rejected; when you were divorced; or when you were at the mall and saw couples hand in hand while you have no one. Or, there were those times when you were cut off from family and friends, when you ached for a hug and it was not forthcoming, when you were scared and wanted

---

<sup>1</sup> Bausch, W.J., ed., “Claiming Ties,” in *A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, (Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), pp. 333-334.

someone to hold you and no one was there for you, when you were betrayed by a friend, or when you felt isolated. These are always painful times for us.

You see what I'm saying? Humans are in desperate need for togetherness, for communion. Our hearts are made for one another and for God. Rejection is such an intolerable hurt because we need desperately to be connected. But my question is why? What is this visceral need for union? Why are the best moments in our lives when we are in relationship with others, and the worst when we aren't?

The answer, simply and profoundly, is recognized in today's Feast. We are made in the image and likeness of God and *God is communion*. God exists in community. God's image is imprinted on our souls, coded on our brain cells, and burned into our hearts. God's own inner self is "to be with," to be in connection, to be family: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's why the apostle says that God is Love and that we are most God like when we are in love, give love, and receive love.

This notion of our God living in community reminds me of a term I learned in seminary. The late David Scott, my systematic theology professor, gave a memorable definition of the Trinity. He observed, "The three Persons of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in a cosmic dance together." This is captured in the Greek term, *perichoresis*. "Peri" literally means "around," and "choresis" means "dancing." It describes the mutual indwelling of the three Persons of the Trinity. Their relationship is so intimate that they are in a constant and harmonious dance.

When we live Trinitarian lives, we are also in a cosmic dance with God and each other. Every desire for companionship, every urge for a hug and an embrace, every act of love gives indirect testimony to the Trinity. The Trinity says that God is community and so we seek

community. The Trinity says that God is love and so we love. We can't help ourselves. We're made to that image and likeness. We are who we are because God is who God is.

The Rev. James T. Tucker writes: "When I was in my late twenties and in Seminary, I was assigned as a seminarian in training to a church in Washington, D.C. It was called field work. My responsibilities required me to be present at services on Sunday mornings, preach occasionally, and to guide the senior high youth group.

One of our youth activities was to go around the city and visit other denominations and attend other religious services. On different occasions, we visited a Franciscan monastery, a synagogue, and the Islamic Center. The Islamic Center was on Massachusetts Avenue just east of the bridge over Rock Creek.

I remember we arrived at a time of prayer and took our shoes off and stood in the back and watched while men in robes knelt on rugs and, facing east, bowed up and down and recited their verses from the *Quran*. Then one of the Imams came over to greet us. He explained the nature of the prayers we had just witnessed and the rule of prayer of five times a day toward Mecca.

Then he turned to me and, with a smile, he said, "You know, there is something that has always confused me about Christian doctrine and that is the idea of the Trinity. Can you explain the Trinity to me?"

Well, with all of these young people in my youth group staring at me, I looked at this Imam and was immediately worried about what I would say. Then, I slowly came to realize that it wasn't just about what I knew in my head. It was about what I knew in my heart—or maybe more accurately, it was about both; because what I was trying to express as a follower of Jesus was a concept that is hard to put into words and analyze logically. It is, indeed, not even a

concept since that implies an idea. It is more a fact, a reality, a feeling. So, I told the Imam it is, in the final analysis, all about love.”<sup>2</sup>

Tucker was right, of course. The Trinity is not so much a doctrine to be learned, but a reality to be embraced. It is the symbol of a loving relationship.

Well, what does this mean for us? Very simply it means that if we are to live Trinitarian lives, we are also called to live in relationship—with God, and with each other. We are to participate in that cosmic dance because we are made in the image of the One who defines relationship, our God of Love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**AMEN**

---

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. James Tucker in *Synthesis*, (May 22, 2005).