

Sermon, Trinity Sunday**One Diocese, One Church, One Service****June 7, 2020****The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel**

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is the day when the Church highlights the mysterious, and some would even say, rather confounding idea of God as three in one. Of course, there is a lot going on in our lives right now, two pandemics. One is a virus, that is unseen, and yet deadly. It hitches a ride in many of us, resides there, to spread to others. It really is not a danger at all, unless it has us, vectors we are called, carrying it around, sharing it unwittingly with others. The second pandemic is racism, it too is a virus. It hitches a ride in many of us, resides there, to spread to others. We are the vectors of racism too, carrying it around, sharing it unwittingly with others. In both pandemics, what will make the virus breed and grow and the remedies against it, are exactly the same. Denial makes both spread like wildfire and the greatest remedy in both cases, is love, for yourself and for others. All of that can make this theological doctrine, the Trinity, seem rather inconsequential. But, today, I hope to dispel that notion.

One reason we selected this Sunday, Trinity Sunday, was to give all of you, clergy and lay, everyone a day off as it were, from doing the magnificent and inspiring jobs you have been doing in helping us stay connected, through all the ways you do that. We wanted to do it soon enough, also in hope, that some of you will be back to face to face worship soon. And finally, Trinity Sunday, was selected as a gift to preachers everywhere as this is the most dreaded Sunday for some preachers. I used to, quite often, as a rector, invite guest preachers, and simply give them the date, and get it all worked out, and let them discover along the way what I had done to them.

Today, it's my turn, and especially having so many great preachers tuning in, and most of them being able to preach this far better than me, this is even more daunting. What goes on in our common life, makes it even more so.

The Trinity is something that truly sets Christianity apart. In fact, it is one of the doctrines that make other faiths somewhat suspicious of us. Like the major Abrahamic faiths, we see God as one, but we add this concept, the Trinity, that God is three... in One.

One of the fatal pitfalls of preaching this day, is trying to explain that. I gave up on that a long time ago. I am much more comfortable now with believing this, without being able to fully explain it. Some might say that is me just getting older, and some may say that is me just getting lazy. As always, you get to decide.

But, what I will say is that it is a doctrine I am much more comfortable with, and I would say, during these days we live through, I am even comforted by.

The Trinity does make its way into modern culture. A whole lot of us worshiping together today know the words from Don McLean's "American Pie."

"And the three men I admire most, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, they caught the last train for the coast, the day, the music died."

I love the song, and I have always loved that line. I don't believe they are all men, got to say that, and his idea about the Trinity doesn't pass muster theologically, but I like his musing anyway, the idea that the Trinity, One God, is relating within itself, and also to the world... actually in it, interested in what happens here. That part I believe is true, and good.

Actually, the idea of the Trinity excites me now more than ever before. I like the idea that we have a God who is a relationship within itself.

Some would say a multiple personality God, which is often seen as bad, but in some sense we all have that. We all have our outward selves, our inner selves, the self we share with a very small group of people, and the blind self that we don't even know FOR ourselves.

One of my favorite theologians, Miroslav Volf, says, “Because the Christian God is not a lonely God, but rather a communion of three persons, faith leads human beings into the divine communion. One cannot, however, have a self-enclosed communion with the Triune God - a ‘foursome,’ as it were - for the Christian God is not a private deity. Communion with this God is at once also communion with those others who have entrusted themselves in faith to the same God. Hence one and the same act of faith places a person into a new relationship both with God and with all others who stand in communion with God.”

- Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*

This is communion, our relationship with God, and with one another. It is communion, when we stay apart, so that others might live. It is communion when we come together, to march or pray or protest however we can for justice. It is communion for us to attempt to change ourselves, so that we can be part of the solutions. Communion is all we do, physically alone, or together, to better the world for all.

I love the idea that our God, is a relationship unto itself, made whole by including all of us.

In a different Trinity of sorts, I want to speak to the Trinity of scenes that are emblazoned in my mind and heart after this past week.

Of course, one has to be our President holding up a Bible, in front of St. John’s Episcopal Church across the street from the White House. The second, nurses and first responders, coming out from the fight with one pandemic, COVID-19, to cheer and thank the protesters walking peacefully through the streets demanding justice and healing from the second pandemic which has raged amongst us for far longer, and the last of a little African-American girl, in the twilight of an evening, obviously during a protest in one of our cities, with a sign bigger than she was, draped over her head, which read, “Am I next?”

Those three, so different scenes have really troubled me this week. They stand in contrast. A powerless child, just beginning to realize the inequalities that are her birthright in this country, and a President, the leader of this country, for that child, and for all of us, with all the power one

can have. Power enough to clear a public square and get the photo shoot he wanted. And then the more hopeful one, workers, heroes on the front lines of two different pandemics, one new, and devastating, the other with us since the inception of this country, and just as devastating.

Somewhere in the midst of all those scenes is the truth, the right way. And in every one of those scenes there is a message for us. Regardless of whether you think the President's Monday stroll to St. John's was a good thing, or a travesty, what it should say to us all, is that it is not enough to carry a Bible, or hold one, we all have to open it, read, mark, and inwardly digest the message that is in it, and then live it. People sometimes ask me if I believe in the Bible and I always say no. I do, however, believe that in it is everything I need to be in communion with our God, and I believe in that God and all the truth that book points to. In that picture of that little girl, her question is not for our society, or only for the police officers, or only for the President. That question is directed right at you and me. The cry for help buried in that question is directed at each of us too. The scene of the health care workers, and protesters applauding for each other, is a glimpse of what we can be, of what should be, of our better selves.

I have heard it said, in these days, that we are not having communion right now. But, I beg to differ. We are not having bread and wine right now, but communion is alive and well and never ended, and never will. I have heard it said, in these days, that our churches are closed, but this is simply not true. The church buildings might be closed, but the Church is not closed, and never will be, because the Church is us, bound together, regardless of time or space. And I have heard it said in these days that God seems far away, but our God, three in one, a relationship in itself, is as close as your next breath.

And I am quite sure I have not explained the Trinity to you today, but actually I didn't really set out to. As Karen Armstrong says, "Jesus didn't spend a great deal of time discoursing about the trinity or original sin or the incarnation, which have preoccupied later Christians. He went around doing good and being compassionate."

In short, he practiced love. In relationship with others, and with our God that is, in and of itself, relationship. That is our greatest bond, the remedy for what ails us, and our primary call as followers of Jesus.

My sisters and brothers I have said these words to you in the name of the Trinity, the one in three that creates, redeems, sustains, and as our ancestors left to us, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.