

A Sermon by the Reverend Elizabeth F. Keeler
Trinity Sunday, Year C
Sunday, June 16, 2019

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15
Psalm 8

Today is Trinity Sunday and initially I was delighted to discover I have never preached on Trinity Sunday. What a wonderful opportunity, finally a chance to unpack and explore the doctrine of the Trinity with a congregation! My excitement was tamped down a bit as I actually attempted to craft a coherent message about the Trinity – which is, I will remind you, an entire theological category unto its Holy Self. So I'm going to take a page from the rector's playbook and begin with a joke:

Jesus asked, "Whom do people say that I am?"

His disciples answered, "Some say you are John the Baptist; others say Elijah or one of the prophets."

Jesus answered them, "But whom do you say that I am?"

Peter spoke up and said, "Thou art the Logos, in consideration of the various functions by which God is related to God's creation, but only on the fact that Scripture speaks of a Father, and a Son, and a Holy Spirit, each member of the Trinity being coequal with each and every other member, and each acting inseparably with and interpenetrating every other member, with only an economic subordination within God, but causing no division which would make the substance no longer simple."

After a long pause, Jesus answering Peter said, "What???"

"What" is the perfect jumping off place. What are we to make of the Trinity which is such a fundamental part of our liturgy, our prayer, our worship, our very understanding of the Divine and how God moves and works in creation, in history, in the Church and in us - in you and in me? The doctrine of the Trinity is at its very heart an assertion that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there is only one God. And yet that one God moves and acts in various autonomous modes and methods. We call them Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Independent, coequal, inseparable, we use many descriptives that are never normally used to describe the same thing in our attempts to define the Trinity. And so perhaps it might be most useful to look at the Trinity from a non-theological point of view and ask quite simply: What difference does it make in my life what I believe about the Holy Trinity? How does my understanding or appreciation of the Trinity affect my life, my faith, my relationships, others, the way I live my life? And it does of course matter – it matters greatly.

One of the most basic ways we were taught in seminary to think about the Trinity was through the lens of relationship and community. Instead of focusing on the distinctive three parts of God - defining the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and then working backwards to see how they fit together, the idea was to focus on what is revealed in their coexistence. What can we learn through the three parts of God being in relationship, this complex operating system of three as one? What might we gather about our God who seamlessly

operates in this intricate relational way? In organic terms, what truths are revealed in the eternal dance of the Triune God?

If we can open our minds to think this way we begin to see God as much more than just a solo, unilateral, one-dimensional force. Rather we begin to appreciate God as interactive and relational, always dancing gracefully in three parts to accomplish God's good work; constantly gliding, dipping, sidestepping, adjusting, moving backwards and forwards. Never alone, always in community, always in relation with God's Self. Three parts, actively, dancing together to achieve God's mission of love, and forgiveness, and wholeness in the world and in us.

Now, if this is the way the triune God works, what might we glean about how we are designed to work – to operate and live? After all, if we are made in the image of God, then we must be designed to work best this way ourselves as well - with one another and with God. And so with this relational understanding of the Trinity we are confronted with the reality that we are created to be in relation with one another. This is why isolation, loneliness, estrangement and rejection are the most hurtful and harmful human experiences and conditions.

It is also why we simply must reject systems that promote exploitation and discrimination. Racism, sexism, unequal relationships of any kind are all essentially sinful because they separate humanity from one another. Because they are a fundamental rejection of community, of relationship, even a rejection of God. Disconnection and estrangement are simply not the way God operates and not the way we were designed to operate either. God dances and we were designed to dance together too.

Friends, the Trinity is neither an unintelligible theological mystery, nor is it a quaint mathematical formula designed to help us understand God. But the Trinity is an equation of sorts, just not one of numbers. It's an equation that points towards relation, to interconnection, to interdependence, to dancing. The doctrine of the Trinity is an account of how God works - how God loves and creates and redeems and sustains - always in relationship.

And the Trinity does make a difference in our lives: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer; the Divine being in relationship, with each other, with us, and with all the peoples of the world. And when we can see ourselves caught up in that relationship, in that love, in that dance, our lives will change and this world will change. Amen.

(Sourced from a sermon preached by The Reverend Ann J. Broomell, Christ Church, New Haven, May 31, 2015)