

It is an amazing and yet peculiar day –Trinity Sunday – when we celebrate a doctrine of the church with its own Sunday! We celebrate other doctrines, central themes, during the church year – the Incarnation and Resurrection – yet these are doctrines directly related to the life of Jesus. The doctrine of the Trinity on the other hand, was not even developed into a doctrine or articulated as such until Tertullian coined the term in the third century. The building blocks from which the doctrine of the trinity was formed are the scriptures we have today: In Genesis when God refers to God’s self as “we’ and not “I.” In the Second Letter to the Corinthians where Paul gives his benediction in language of the triune God, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.” And in the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries when the doctrine of the Trinity was carefully crafted these scriptures were of the utmost importance. To say, we believe there is one God – not three Gods, but one – in three persons – not two, or four, but three persons, all of the same substance, the God-substance, the God essence of the eternal.<sup>i</sup>

Trinity Sunday is a favorite of mine, a special feast day. Now, I should say, it’s not because I claim to *understand* the Doctrine of the Trinity, that three-in-one and one-in-three business, or because I have heard understandable sermons on the topic – no snickering, now! So why you ask, in short, it is – very simply – because it reminds me that our God is a God of relationship. That’s right, if you take anything home today from my sermon, I hope it is just that – our God is a God of relationship. And celebrating Trinity Sunday each year on the Sunday following Pentecost reminds me that our relationships are gifts of the Spirit. We are given the Holy Spirit and called into ministry – and this ministry centers on relationships. When we receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost we are called more deeply into relationship – relationship with God and with one another. These special feasts of the church, Pentecost and Trinity, invite us to remember, to experience, how our God is a God of relationship – beginning first with the relationships that exist within God.

And that’s where the incompressible sermons come in – with our trying to explain how God exists in relationship with God’s self! But, stay with me a moment....and it will become clear! Pentecost brings us to Trinity. The Holy Spirit is given to us to carry out the work of Jesus. The Spirit points us toward Jesus. And Jesus brings us back to God. It’s a vicious circle of sorts! We return to God only to be sent out, as Jesus was sent, to return again to God. And we are sent out, commissioned by our baptism, to be God’s instruments in brining one another, bringing others, closer to God – now, that’s something we could only do with the gift of the Spirit. This is our life together as a community of Jesus, our call to carry out Jesus’ ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation and to accept Jesus’ love and return again. Always return to God. And we do this with the power of the Spirit. I believe it is this deeper, more intimate relationship with God that we are longing for – a relationship that we wouldn’t have without the love of Jesus and the power of the Spirit. And God is not the only one who exists in relationship -- you and me – we also exist in relationship.

Now, you can see how much trouble we preachers get into trying to explain the Trinity or find the perfect illustration or metaphor so it will all “click” and make sense. – it’s a little bit of a “who’s on first” tale. But then I suppose that is a realistic picture of our lives, isn’t it! That’s why I say that Trinity is a favorite occasion in the church for me because it simply reminds me that our God is a God of relationship – and that more then explaining it all, I need to be living it!

Preachers also get in trouble when we assume that our hunger and longing will naturally bring us closer to God. But I suspect this does not happen on its own or because we attempt to direct it to – relationships don't work that way, do they? No, maybe our relationship with God is like the neighbor next door, who is nice enough, even a "good neighbor" but you've never so much as sat down to have lunch together. Keeping God at a good distance probably comes to us more naturally than we'd care to admit! Like a "good neighbor" you can call on in a pinch, but really, we're not likely to do that, are we? And yet, God keeps inviting us in, inviting us closer, deeper, more than just friends, God pursues us like a lover. And we can either accept God's love or keep God at an arm's length like that "good neighbor" or maybe we even walk away at times, declining the invitation God extends.

And yet, God like a good friend, invites us back again. It is a good friendship and the grace of God that bring us here this morning to meet and greet God here in this sanctuary and here in the faces of one another. And look around, there are relationships at every corner! We have a relationship with the church, with the building and its furnishings; we may remember her particular past and our history here. We may have a hopeful relationship with the future, a sense of promise and new life that are possible for us. And there are the relationships we have with one another, ones that may be old friends, others new friends – neighbors who are becoming good friends.

We exist in relationships of every kind and quality. God exists in relationships.

We celebrate our relationships in this place because God is not the only one who exists in relationships – we do too. And we are here this morning because of our relationship with God – whether as an old friend, or a new one, whether we are courting or testing or quarreling, we are here in this relationship with God, here in this time we set aside to pray, to come into God's presence, to accept God's love for us, to ask for God's grace and guidance in our lives.

Trinity Sunday reminds us our God is a God of relationship; the Spirit infuses our relationships with life, new life that points us to Jesus and calls us to continue his ministry of making God's love known. All this makes it clear – as I see it, that this ministry we are about is something we do together. We desire right relationships: relationships with God, our self, and with one another. The church's work, our call to ministry, our accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit, this highlights that what we do – we do together.

Well, the other time that preachers get into trouble is when they have said all they need to say and then keep on talking!

So... the gospel message for today – the good news of Jesus Christ, and the calling set forth by the Spirit: God is a God of relationship. And today God is inviting you into relationship...a relationship so full of grace and spirit that we cannot help but share that good news.

So, blessings on all of us this Trinity Sunday, on all our relationships, and on the church's relationships, both old and new friends; thanks be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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<sup>i</sup> *First Sunday after Pentecost – Trinity Sunday*, sermon by The Rev. Katherine Merrell Glenn, May 26, 2002.