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Trinity Triangle

Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

The story is told of three criminals who rob a horse drawn carriage and take a young orphan, Tiffany, away with them. She is a charming, endearing, and inquisitive youngster. They become attached to her and so do not mind her questions. She often asks them about what they are doing with their lives. Because of who she is and how she interacts with them, they succumb to her strong influence and turn from their life of crime. They go out and round up abandoned and lost children in the area. To provide a place for all of the children to live they buy a castle. There they live a happy life. When the children grow up they build a village around the castle with three tall towers – one for each of the three former robbers (*The Three Robbers*, Tomi Ungerer, comments by Janet Lloyd: *Joy & Wonder in All God's Works, Year C*).

As have so many who have experienced God in their lives through the presence, power, and influence of the Holy Spirit, these three robbers experienced the healing power of forgiveness. God's grace was given. The three welcomed and received it, and they began a new and powerful life of purpose and love.

This Sunday in the Church Year is Trinity Sunday when we focus on God and how we as Christians experience and know of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We learn from John 3 that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit cooperate in our salvation. God loves the world and everyone in it. God is the one who created the world and cares for everything and everyone in it. We also learn that Jesus lived among us, showed us how we are to live, and loved us enough to die for us. Yes, God sent Jesus to save us. And we learn that it is the Holy Spirit that brings us new life. Our personal experiences of God's loving care in our daily living are the work of the Holy Spirit. And remember John 3:8 reads, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Anna, a sensitive child from Vietnam, stops everyday on her way home from school to talk with elderly Nana Marie. When Nana Marie becomes blind, Anna tells Nana that since she did not have a last day to see the world, she has brought her, "Everything I saw today, just as if you saw it with me.... And tomorrow I'll bring you another – and the next day another. I'll bring you enough seeing to last forever." Again, in her book, Janet Lloyd explains to us the religious/faith significance of what Anna does for Nana Marie:

In this story Anna, by becoming Nana Marie's eyes, begins a new relationship with Nana Marie. It is, for sure, a relationship of giving, sharing, and love. The Holy Spirit functions for us in much the same way. The Spirit enables us to enter into a new relationship with God. It helps us in our blindness to 'see' God's world.

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” In writing on these words from Romans 8, Carolyn Brown comments, “...the message is simply that people who follow the urgings of God’s Spirit within them, who are pushed along in God’s wind, become God’s children.” The opportunity to become God’s children is open to anyone, even to people we fear, despise, mistrust, or don’t like. Certainly, after his conversion experience, the Apostle Paul, author of the letter to the Romans, was feared and not trusted by the Jewish Christians whom he had been persecuting.

We may experience God coming to us, being there for us, as in ways we experience the wind. As Carolyn Brown reminds us in *Forbid Them Not, Year B*,

We may experience God comforting us when we are in difficult situations, as a cool breeze comforts us on a hot day. That cool breeze may come to us in our prayer time, in the reading of the Bible, in other written words, in worship, in the melody of music, at the Lord’s Table, in the beauty or awesomeness of the created order, and/or in the presence, action, and/or words of another person. Or we may experience God having to get our attention by being like a strong wind that prunes dead wood from trees, so that we are pushed to let go of bad habits and wrong ideas. It may be that you feel that a Bible reading or a prayer or a sermon was aimed just at you, at your particular situation, what you were going through in your life at the time. Or it may be that there is a medical problem that causes you to reflect on and likely get you to change your lifestyle and the priorities in your life.

Or maybe you have experienced a situation similar to that in the story of *The Brick*:

A young and successful executive was traveling down a neighborhood street, going a bit too fast in his new Jaguar. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something. As his car passed, no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the Jag’s side door! He slammed on the brakes and spun the Jag back to the spot from where the brick had been thrown. He jumped out of the car, grabbed some kid and pushed him against a parked car shouting, “What was that all about and who are you? Just what the heck are you doing?” Building up a head of steam he went on: “That’s a new car and that brick you threw is going to cost a lot of money. Why did you do it?!” “Please, mister, please. I’m sorry, I just didn’t know what else to do!” pleaded the youngster. “I threw the brick because no one else would stop...” tears were dripping down the boy’s chin as he pointed around the parked car. “It’s my brother,” he said. “He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can’t lift him up!” Sobbing, the boy asked the executive, “Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He’s hurt and he’s too heavy for me.” Moved by the words, the executive tried to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. He lifted the young man back into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts, checking to see that everything was going to be okay. “Thank you and God bless you,” the grateful child said to him. The man then watched the little boy push his brother down the sidewalk toward their home. It was a long walk back to the Jaguar..., a long, slow walk. He never repaired the side door. He kept the dent to remind him not to go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention. God is there for us, but may have to come in some unexpected ways so that we pay attention to God and seek to be faithful to God in our daily living.

God may at times surprise us by being present when we least expect it, like a wind springing up from out of nowhere. This may be in the form of that person who stops to help you when you have car trouble in a strange and distant place. It may be in the form of some other act of random kindness done

for you by a total stranger, lifting your spirits when you really needed to see concern and compassion expressed.

God is also experienced like the wind that supports and pushes us along faster than we dreamed possible, as the wind takes a kite soaring into the sky or as it sends a sailboat speeding across the water. For me in these experiences of how God acts, I think of the Holy Spirit using the insight of another to encourage us, push us, get us soaring into a new area of life. That person might suggest a new career opportunity; or to go back to school or take a new job or a job transfer in another part of the country or in a different country. Or that person might suggest we work on developing a talent, ability, and/or skill because they can see that within us – be it in music, the arts, sports, a career possibility, or a hobby or craft.

The idea of the Trinity is simply that God reveals Godself in several different ways, but throughout it is the same Creative, Loving Power we experience Who is revealing Godself.”

“We do find in the New Testament a Trinitarian, or three-fold religious experience. Christians had experienced ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.’”

From a sermon by Dr. Vernon A. Loescher:

Yes, Christian people, as they grew in their experiences of God, summarized their experiences in three ways. They knew God as the great Creative Power out of Whose creative activity came the universe, including our world, the laws by which it operates, and its beauties. They also had the experience that when they were with Jesus and felt the power and the love of His personality, they felt themselves coming closest to understanding and knowing God. And they experienced that, when Jesus was gone from them, they still knew the power and presence of God in their lives. To the experience of God as Creator, they gave the name ‘Father’. To the experience they had of God in and through knowing Jesus the Christ, they gave the name ‘Son’. To the experience of God’s continuing fellowship, comfort, challenge, guidance, and presence – they gave the name ‘Holy Spirit’. But in all of the experiences, it was the same Creative, Just, Loving, Redemptive, Power called God.

The Presbyterian Church General Assembly meeting in Birmingham, AL later this month will consider approving a document, "The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing.”

In places the document reads:

The love of the triune God made known to us in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is plentiful beyond measure. It is given freely and extravagantly, utterly unmerited and unexpected. It is always greater than we can imagine or conceive. Like a gushing fountain, God’s love overflows toward us. It freely pours forth in an inexhaustible stream, never diminished in the giving, never drying up. It is constant and trustworthy. It is more powerful than all the forces of sin and evil that deny and resist the gift and call of the love of God given to us in Jesus Christ and shared with us by the Holy Spirit. It cannot be quenched, even by death itself.”

And,

About this the church must have no doubt: the doctrine of the Trinity proclaims to us the very heart of God, made known to us and to the world in the self-sacrificial love of Jesus Christ and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Again, as the doctrines of the church took form, it was clear that the only way Christians could express what is inexpressible – the nature of God – was in the doctrine of the Trinity. And according to the Christian doctrine, the Three “Persons” in the Trinity always cooperate together in perfect community of thought, purpose and action.

Perhaps the most commonly used symbol of the Holy Trinity is an equilateral triangle. The triangle often appeared in the catacombs of Rome as a symbol of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one, equal, eternal. The triangle reminds us that the three “persons” are ‘co-equal’. Each side of the triangle represents a “person” of the Godhead. In this equilateral triangle the sides and angles are equal. Each side, each angle is the symbol of a part of the Trinity, yet the triangle is one figure representing the unity of the Trinity.

On the bulletin is a clipart of ‘interwoven circles.’ Each circle represents one of the “Persons” in the Trinity. The circle has no apparent beginning or ending, signifying the eternal nature of each “person” of the Godhead. Usually the three circles are interlaced or intertwined, thus forming one design that symbolizes the unity of the eternal God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father is the Creator, revealed by Jesus the Christ, and operating in humanity as Holy Spirit.

We are welcomed as God’s beloved because God has entered into fundamental connection with us in the person of Jesus the Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our triune God cares about us, is concerned for us, wants only the best for us, wants us to use our talents and abilities in service to God and to others, wants us to be faithful to God in our daily living. Our triune God who created and creates is sovereign over all. Our triune God came to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to show us what it means to be fully human and how God wants us to live. Our triune God is present with us through the Holy Spirit who comforts, guides, inspires, encourages, and empowers. It is one and the same triune God who created us, who saves us, and who continues to live with us always.