

Sermon – “Reflections on the Trinity”

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-5, 2:1- 4, II Corinthians 13:11-13

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On this Trinity Sunday, our first scripture reading is the creation story found in Genesis 1:1-5 and 2:1-4. Listen to God’s Holy Word.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day...

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. Amen.

The readings for Trinity Sunday invite us to reflect on what we believe about God. Christianity is a monotheistic faith affirming one living and true God and is sometimes called *peculiar monotheism* because we uphold *three Persons in the Godhead...* *These three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory*, according to the Shorter Catechism. The doctrine of the Trinity was first articulated in the Nicene Creed around 325 C.E.

The word “trinity” is not found in the Bible; however, we see glimpses of it in a few New Testament passages. In the last chapter of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthian Church (13:11-13), we find the most explicitly Trinitarian formula in all of Paul’s writings. This reflects Paul’s triadic understanding of God, which he shared with the Early Church. This is the word of God.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The title of the sermon “Reflections on the Trinity”

The text: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” II Corinthians 13:13*

Let us pray: Holy Triune God, we thank you for the wonderful complexity of who you are and how you relate to us. May our relationships with one another reflect your image and may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

A circle is an endless line, having no beginning and no end, symbolizing eternity and God. Three interlocking circles are the symbol for the Trinity reminding us that these three, eternal and unified persons (equal in power and glory) coexist within relationship.

The early Christians found themselves in a dilemma and it is out of this dilemma that the doctrine of the Trinity was created. Their dilemma was that they believed in one God. Monotheism is a primary belief of Judaism. Jesus, a devout Rabbi, embraced the belief in one God, Creator, Holy and wholly other—as did his followers.

And yet, following his death and resurrection, in retrospect, the experience of Jesus of Nazareth left his followers convinced that this was truly God in their midst, living for a while among them. As they considered the possibility of God becoming one of them—entering into their human experience to be their mentor and Savior—they were deeply touched and yet confused as to how this fit into their understanding of who God is. Was their devotion to Jesus a betrayal of Yahweh?

To compound the dilemma, they also believed that God was present with them still, literally inside of them to empower and sustain them in their daily lives. They believed that the One who created them and redeemed them would not leave them alone but continued to initiate a relationship in the presence of the Holy Spirit...even as the spirit breathed life into and hovered watchfully over creation.

It is precisely because of the tenacity and incredible courage of these early believers of Christ that our understanding of who God is has been so enriched in the doctrine of the Trinity. They refused to deny their personal experience and encounter “face to face” with the grace of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, they refused to give up the heart of their Judaea tradition—namely that there is one God.

Out of this time of chaos and confusion was an opportunity for creativity. Even as the spirit of God brought forth order out of chaos in the creating of the world, a new way of understanding God was being formed. When there seemed to be only two options, it was suddenly clear there was a third. Why not embrace one God and at the same time celebrate the distinct ways God has made Godself known?

Why limit God to one way of being... to one way of expressing Godself... to one way of loving God’s people...to one people of God? All of a sudden, a doctrine that was intended to assert the power of God, namely monotheism, became an obstacle to God’s creative nature. And what was true then is true today. When we limit God, we limit ourselves. The Trinity recognizes the majesty and mystery of God who is both infinite and intimate, known and unknowable, transcendent and transparent.

Sadly, the doctrine of the Trinity has lost the richness of its original intent to celebrate the dynamic of relationship. When we hear “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” we don’t think about the relationship among these three. Yet, this was precisely what the Early Christians thought. They celebrated the intimacy and partnership of the three persons of the Godhead (unique and separate, same in substance, equal in power and glory), and they marveled at the way they complemented one another as the Holy Trinity.

What is true in the dynamic of the relationships within the Trinity is also true in our relationships with one another. When we recognize the uniqueness of each human being created in the image of God (equal in power and glory) and when we celebrate the diversity of gifts among us and all the ways we complement one another, like interlocking circles, we create a community which reflects the Triune God.

Today as we recognize Westminster’s music ministry, we are again reminded of the beauty and richness created when diverse voices (equal in power and glory) blend together in harmony with one another.

This week across our country in over 430 cities we have witnessed hundreds of thousands of diverse people coming together (mostly peacefully) lifting their voices in a blended harmony to challenge racial injustice. People of color and white privilege, people of faith and unbelievers, men and women, old and young, rich and poor, equal in substance and power, longing for reform and change in the way we treat one another within community.

Our hope and prayer is that George Floyd’s six-year old daughter was right this week when she spoke from her heart, “My daddy is changing the world.” As the country mourns this tragic death and unspeakable loss, our sorrow is multiplied by the meaning of Mr. Floyd’s death. This senseless act of disregard for human life affirms once again that racism is alive and well within our country.

However, out of this time of chaos and confusion there is an opportunity for creativity, even as the spirit of God brought forth order out of chaos and created the world and the early followers of Christ formed a new understanding of who God is. May we as the church, reformed and always reforming, hear the voices of our young people and seize this opportunity for reform.

Both the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson and the Director of the Office of Public Witness, Rev. Jimmie R. Hawkins made statements this week joining the Presbyterian voice with other voices in the harmony to advocate for justice, to acknowledge our complicity in the injustice and inequity, and to stand in solidarity with the victims of racism.

As we reflect on our understanding of who God is and who God calls us to be in this time and place, may we have the same courage and creativity of those who came before us and not limit our God or ourselves. May we recognize the uniqueness of each human being created in the image of God (same in substance and equal in power and glory) and ensure the inherent value and dignity of all people. May we always celebrate the beauty and complexity of relationships--among the Three Persons in our Triune God and within our community. ...And come Sunday, may the dear Lord Above; God Almighty, God of Love, look down and see our people through. Amen.