

Trinity Sunday... Last week we celebrated the sending of the Holy Spirit, and this week we focus on the Trinity. The three in one and the one in three... A recent poll asked Pastor's which Sunday was their least favorite to preach, and guess what, it happens to be today-- Trinity Sunday.

Trinitarian language permeates everything in our worship-- we gather in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit... We receive God's forgiveness through the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... We baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... It's everywhere in our worship.

In Seminary, we read a lot of books on the Trinity. We examined Trinitarian heresies; we studied the politics of the formation of the creeds. If you want to learn some interesting history, look up the asterisk in the Nicene Creed... That's known as the filioque clause... At issue was the theological relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit...

Big time theological disagreement between the Western Catholic church, and the Eastern Orthodox church... In fact, the first major split in the Christian church.

In Seminary, I experienced that learning about the Trinity is a little like learning about the ocean by taking a walk on the beach. And like all good education, you learn a lot, but perhaps the most important thing you learn, is an appreciation of how little you really know. And truth be told, I'm glad the Trinity is bigger than what my little mind can comprehend. We always have to be humble when we talk about the Trinity.

The Trinity is a mysterious subject. Like so much of Christianity... And there is power in mystery. There's a part in all of us, our soul, which loves mystery. There's beauty in mystery, there's longing in mystery. It's inviting, it pulls us into conversation and we wonder, we marvel, we fall in love. Mystery can be so very magnetic... I think that's one of the beautiful things about the Trinity.

Quick story... In one of my systematic theology classes we had to write four big papers. One on the Father as the creator, one focusing on the Son as redeemer, one on the Holy Spirit as sanctifier, and one final paper on the integration of the three.

When I was writing about the Father as creator, I was passionate about telling stories of lambing and about gardening. I've always been a kind of a farm boy so the new creation stuff was exciting for me-- I loved it! I kind of resonated with a God who would walk in the garden with Adam and Eve... My professor loved that paper.

When I was writing about the Son as redeemer, my paper was like a book report. I covered high Christology and low Christology, the Christological controversy, various atonement theologies, so on and so forth... But it was dry... My professor gave me a good grade, but she remarked that it didn't seem like my heart was in it. At the time I didn't know what to make of her comment...

When I was writing about the Holy Spirit as sanctifier, I found my passion again in stories of older adults whose lives were full, stories of people who were loving,

kind and gracious. These people always seem like walking miracles to me. And again, my professor liked my paper and commented about my passion.

As interesting as those papers were back then, I've noticed that perhaps some of my passions have changed. For example, of the three, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, right now in my life, I might be more passionate about the Son, than I might be about the Father or the Holy Spirit...

I guess what I'm trying to say, is that over a lifetime of experiences with God, sometimes we might feel closer to God in one way more than in another. And maybe that's why we have the Trinity.

Suffice it to say, the Trinity means a lot of things to different people and to be honest, I can only speak from my own experiences. For the past few years, I've come to see the trinity as a dance, and as a way to love; and to a very particular kind of love. I'll try to explain...

Two weeks ago, I introduced a topic called "Mimetic Theory," it's a system of understanding human relations. Remember? Two boys and one toy?

Interestingly, it's based on a Trinitarian way of experiencing relationships. Two boys and one toy... To put it simply, all human relationships are essentially triangular in nature.

Mimetic theory says that personhood is formed in a trinity of considerations—a subject, a model and an object: a little boy, another little boy, and a toy. All human relationships are fundamentally triangular. They involve three parts...

And these relationships can take one of two possible paths: into a path of rivalry—which leads to conflict and possible violence, or into a path of non-rivalry characterized by self-giving, mutual support, and love.

So, you're wondering, what difference does it make? Let's look at this trinitarian "path of rivalry" in our everyday lives? Let me give you some concrete examples... Perhaps, you will start to see how basic and foundational this is for understanding humanity and how we understand God...

How about, politics? Very triangular, Republicans, Democrats and an issue. It almost seems ridiculous these days... If one party believes something should happen on Monday, the other party will say "no, it should happen on the day after Sunday."

Another example... How about—Love Triangles... We all know what that is... I'm kind of embarrassed to admit this, but I used to really like that TV show *Nashville*. Essentially, it was a soap opera, but with a lot of really cool guitars...

Anyway, every single main character in that show was involved in a love triangle. And believe me; it didn't go well for any of them. Two people fell in love, then one of them "innocently" fell in love with someone else, and then jealousies and broken hearts and getting revenge... over and over again... This is not divine trinitarian love; this is very human triangular heart break...

Another example... How about sports? Vikings, Packers and the win... I don't have to explain that one, do I? We like to kid each other about our teams... And, sometimes it can cross a line. Even in the spirit of friendly banter, sometimes hurtful things can be said...

How about biblical examples: Original sin... Adam, Eve and the fruit. And right away, in the next generation, rivalry descends into violence: Cain murders Able in a rivalry over a sacrifice.

How about Sarah and Hagar and giving birth to Abraham's Heir... Or Jacob and Esau and the blessing... Joseph and his brothers and a coat... Many, many examples of very human love triangles ending up in jealousy, rivalry, conflict, hurt, pain and even death.

Divine Trinity, on the other hand is the complete opposite. In our reading from John, Jesus says "All that the Father has is mine."

The Father gives absolutely everything to the Son, and instead of the Son using it for his own glory, the Son turns around and gives everything, completely back to the father. There is absolutely no rivalry; just mutual self-giving of one to the other; and again, and again, and for always-- a dance of perpetual self-giving and love!

And the only way this kind of love is possible at all, is through the Spirit. The third element, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... Instead of a relationship of rivals and violence, it is a relationship of mutuality and love.

In our reading from Roman's, Paul says the God's love has been poured into *our* hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. We too partake in that very same self-giving love. Whenever we love God and love our neighbor, we participate in that Divine Trinity, that Divine Dance of self-giving.

Whenever we ask ourselves--What would Jesus do? We participate in the divine trinity. A completely different way of being in the world.

The good news today, is that the Trinity is about a new kind of love triangle. Because the Trinity is love, we can love too... Remember, God doesn't love you if you're good; God loves you because God is good and exactly because of that love, we are free to live in the Spirit and to love others in a radically new and different way...

And we're proof that it happens, with every act of love for one another... Every time we share from our abundance, or take an offering, every time we show up on Sunday or for fellowship... Every time we offer a kind word... Every time we listen to one another and care for each other.

Every time we are loving, kind and gracious, we are showing the rest of the world there is an alternative...

It's really simple... the Trinity is all about Love, and a love relationship... A relationship we are all a part of, and thanks be to God!