

Prov. 8:1-4, 22-31; Ps. 8; Rom. 5:1-5; Jn. 16:12-15

### Trinity Sunday

This past week I found myself on my knees in prayer even more than usual. You see, we here at St. Paul's were crawling our way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by installing a wireless network in our offices. The key word there being crawling. Possibly by virtue of being the youngest in the office, or maybe because I was most recently on vacation, I somehow drew the shortest straw and was asked to install this wireless network. So I spent the better part of a day hacking through our somewhat efficient system, you know the one, with fifteen cables going in seventeen directions, complete with 10 and 12 year old computers performing unnecessary tasks?

Even with all this I was rewarded at the end of the day with a moment, one shining moment, when it worked, my laptop could wirelessly access both the internet *and* our file server. Brilliant. Until it all came crashing down. Everything. Somehow not only did the wireless network not work, but our wired network wasn't working. No one could access the internet, their email, the file server, anything outside of their own computer. And did I mention that all this happened with our parish administrator Pat Smith needing to do two bulletins and an Epistle? Because the next day was her last in the office before a well deserved vacation? So that's when I found myself on my knees...trying everything I could, and praying

very earnestly about this fill-in-your-favorite-word wireless network.

And yet it was in that moment that Pat Smith and I received a revelation, a new meaning of the Trinity. Simply put, the Trinity is a wireless network that can be a mystery to us all. You can no more diagram our network at St. Paul's than you can the co-eternal Three in One. Both inspire great devotion and as I said earlier, entirely earnest prayer. The difference, though, is that the next day, with assistance from the onscreen program, MacHelp, I was able to figure enough out about what wasn't working to get our networks up and running. For now. The Trinity, however, remains shrouded in

Mystery, glimpsed by metaphor, seen through art, heard through song.

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So we have come to another Trinity Sunday, feared by many preachers, and feared even more by their parishioners. I've heard it said that more poor theology is preached on this day than all the rest of the Sundays put together. So, with some trepidation, I'll add my attempt to the mix. But I will say that it is with this worry in mind that some in the Church try to downplay the doctrine of the Trinity. After all, the word "trinity" is found nowhere in Scripture, and the verses that we heard this morning are among the few that reference the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one passage. Some say that it is just the product of the

early Church debating with the Greek philosophers of their day. And some simply ignore it, hoping that it will just go away. I'm here to say at the very least that we cannot ignore it, for if we do as Christians, it is at our own peril. Because this understanding of the Divine, the doctrine of the Trinity, isn't just about a statement of belief written down thousands of years ago, for in it lies the very seeds of our lives together as the created. The Trinity shows us the nature of God, and in turn the true nature of the Creation.

What we must remember is that this doctrine didn't just come from out of thin air. It wasn't made up by erudite scholars contemplating their navels. It came about because the people of God were having experiences of the Divine that did not fit the

categories that they had previously known. To begin with, quite literally, was the experience of God, from the Garden to the burning bush to the Ark and the Temple. And then after millennia, came *the* revelation of God, known to us as Jesus the Christ. God made human. Fully human, and yet fully Divine, like no other human this world had seen. Conqueror of death itself. Soon to follow, the people of God experienced this Holy Spirit, something that looked like flames of fire, and rushed like a violent wind, filling the hearts of the disciples with wisdom and guidance of God. What was a believer to do? Here were three distinct experiences. But there is, was and always shall be only one God, existing before all time,

Creator of all. How does this make sense? Or more importantly, what does this mean?

Fred Borsch, the former Bishop of Los Angeles, as well as professor of religion at Princeton once said this, "There are probably a number of people who imagine that the idea of the Trinity was thought up by ivory-tower theologians who, typically, were making things more complicated than they needed to be and were obscuring the simple faith of regular believers. In fact, it seems that the process worked pretty much the other way around. Practicing believers and worshipers were driven by their experiences of God's activity to the awareness that God related in several different ways to the creation. This complex and profound faith was then handed

over for the theologians to try and make more intelligible. They have been trying ever since."

Trying is an apt word. As I've preached before, one of the most profound theologians the Christian Church has ever known, the African, Augustine of Hippo, once wrote that he spoke of the Trinity only not to remain silent. And yet every Sunday we say one of the first and most fundamental attempts to grasp the Trinity. What might that be? Yes, the gift handed down to us as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, crafted by the First and Second Ecumenical Councils. Remember friends, the debate about the nature of God was fierce in the early Church, and people most were literally dying for their beliefs about who this Christ was, and what this Holy Spirit had to

do with anything. Into this madness, the Cappadocian Fathers, (or, as I like to call them, the Capp Daddies) Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil the Great, were sought out to help make some sense of this Mystery. Now, it is a most dangerous proposition to attempt to quantify Mystery, because by its very nature Mystery cannot be controlled or mastered. But in order to follow a God one must know at the very least whom to address, so the Creed was crafted.

Into this theological breach these three men walked, and became the major architects of this Nicene Creed that we speak every week, with the words, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.” And because of this Creed, in the midst

of great conflict and division, what came about was definition. No longer could people accuse Christians of being polytheists. And with this creed people could say what it was this Triune God was and was not. Take some time and attention in a few minutes as we say this creed, pay attention to the words, something just might come forward that you have not heard before.

Well, that’s nice and important, you might say, but I don’t speak philosophical Greek. What is the Good News about this God that we believe in? Why does this matter for my life today? Simply put, it is this, that the root of all that is, this world, this universe, the created, all that has life, is founded on

relationship. On shared love in action. And because of this, the Creator speaks volumes about the created.

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This finally brings me to one of my favorite glimpses into what this Trinity might be. It comes from the theologian Mary W. Anderson remembering a memorable experience about the Trinity at age three, (not something that I experienced at three years old, but maybe you did) “I was watching my grandmother sleep during her afternoon nap. As I contemplated her existence, I thought wisely. "That's Grandmama, Mamma, and Odell." She smiled in her sleep as I called her by the names used for her by her grandchildren, her daughter, and her husband. Three

names, three relationships— and yet the same person. Amazing!”

Amazing. And simple, and true. For if there is one thing that undergirds our sacred words this morning it is the understanding of relatedness. In Romans, Paul describes the Three Experiences of the Divine One as related actions. God giving peace through Christ, God’s love pouring into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. John’s Gospel writes of a guiding, declaring, glorifying God. Everything that our God does is in *relation* to other beings, always in motion, always in communion with others. The foundation of who we are, the Source of all that is, is about communion, oneness in diversity. And wishes this for *us*, asks this of us, even demands this of us.

This is why the vision of one woman napping, strange as it may sound, is Good News for the created. One woman was known by three names, experienced in three distinct ways, but remained one all the same. And existed to relate and to love. Truth be told that's a much brighter glimpse into glory than the confounding nature of an infernal computer network.

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