

SERMON- Trinity (A)
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Genesis 1:1-2:4a

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Matthew 28:16-20

Psalm 8

St. Timothy's (Herndon)
June 4, 2023

I speak to you in the name of the One, Holy and Undivided Trinity. AMEN

OPENING:

This Sunday is oftentimes known as

Assistant Rector Sunday

or *Associate Rector Sunday*.

Or *Seminarian Sunday*.

Or *Youth Minister Sunday*.

This is because head clergy oftentimes try to pawn it off to someone else lower on the totem-pole, in order to escape the complicated doctrinal and theological aspects of TRINITY SUNDAY.

The result is, say if it's Youth Sunday, is that you might see someone stand-up with a prop... like an egg, or a glass of water, or a piece of wood.

And they might talk about how the Trinity is LIKE "that" prop.

The Trinity is *like* an egg: chicken, egg and yolk.

The Trinity is *like* water: vapor, ice and liquid.

The Trinity is *like* a tree: branch, root and trunk.

Now, by that point, the poor preacher has wandered into this heresy or that about the Trinity, but people *like* the prop so much that they are satisfied.

Unfortunately for me, it's not Youth Sunday, and Father Franklin preached last weekend, and I did not bring any props.

So you and I are stuck.

It's Trinity Sunday, the one day of the church year which does not focus on one of God's mighty acts, but instead on an idea.

I am going to avoid trying to explain to you what the Trinity is as an idea.

Instead, I am going to try to explain to you why it matters in our lives, and how it cannot really be explained, only revealed.

COMMUNITY:

First a story:

I have a clergy friend who has been at this for a while, and he talks about how he kept hearing about folks saying they are “spiritual but not religious.”

“Spiritual but not religious”

“SNBR” is the acronym and it’s for folks who feel some connection to God and their faith but are not totally on board with the institution of religion. They might prefer the quietude of a nature hike or personal prayer to worshipping together like we are here. You might describe yourself this way

It's a phenomenon that the church is grappling with currently:

“I am ‘spiritual but not religious’” claim hip Millennials and Gen Y.

“I am ‘Spiritual but not religious’” claim hippie Boomers.

My friend said he heard that phrase so that much that he got up, one Sunday, and preached a sermon claiming that he was the opposite:

“I am religious, but not particularly spiritual.” “I am religious, but not spiritual.”

RBNS

He was trying to say as a Christian, even as an ordained person, it’s hard to possess some special connection to God that might allow those nature hikes or personal prayer time to be entirely fruitful.

It was his way of saying that the phenomenon might not be as deep as it sounds, that, for all the problems of “religion,” that that’s the thing that ties you to your neighbor and to God in a deep and meaningful way.

His point was that you might need the institutional church, and even more so the local worshipping community, to help you to be spiritual. That the religious part, the church part, that’s the hard part. And the part really matters.

I happen to agree with him. Granting you all the caveats about how you CAN indeed find God by your lonesome, etc.

TRINITY:

What does this have to do with the Trinity?

(Follow me here)

We sometimes like to think of God, especially God the Father, as someone who is far-off, remote, and, therefore, alone.

That somehow God, Godself, is also “spiritual but not religious.”

If that’s so, the thinking goes, maybe I should be too.

And the two of us can have this connection as lonely wanderers in the universe.

I don’t think that’s a particularly accurate picture of God.

GENESIS

If we read Genesis carefully, we are surprised to read that “In the Beginning” God spoke in the ‘Royal We’ (1st person plural) —revealing that the Trinity—this interrelationship, this interdependence, this dance of the three persons—was hardwired into the DNA of God from the beginning.

God treasures community so much because God is already and has always been in relationship with Godself.

Thus God thought the Trinity was such a grand idea, that he created this incredible community known as creation and, in particular, this thing called humanity, because God’s intention is that we should not be alone.

So God was never so lonely that he needed us, he already had the Son and the Spirit. Rather he thought Adam might be lonely, and so he created Eve.

That’s hard to kind of wrap your brain around, but stick with me:

Genesis 1.26. “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness”

The ‘Royal We’: the Trinity from the get-go, always mutual in-giving, always creative energy being shared, always a plural, one in three, three in one, always a reality that we should understand not as an idea but as the fundamental way that we should exist in this world.

The Trinity, then, is not a dusty doctrine or an ancient argument but God’s dream for how we live:

God is calling us to live together:

from the smallest Christian community, two people, say Adam and Eve, or any marriage.

To a bigger one, the family,

to a still bigger one, the church.

We are all engaged in this process of being dependent upon, of caring for, and relating to one another as parts of the community.

CHURCH

Now my friend who was provoking folks who said they were “spiritual but not religious” folks had a vested interest in criticizing it. So do I.

If the SBNRs can satisfy their longing for the Triune God with an App on their phone, he and I are out of our jobs. I will admit that.

But, remember, all of this came to a head, recently, during COVID, when the concept of the Trinity came under an interesting examination.

What does it mean if we could go to Church separated from one another? What if technology allowed us to be part of it from home? We could indeed be spiritual but not religious.

What was the result? It was somewhat of a disaster.

Functionally and in practice, but also doctrinally, religiously.

William Willimon said it this way, talking about the person who says:

“I don’t need to go back to church, I like it from home....’

(Willimon says) “Eventually you will have to deal with the Trinity: (that) God is social and relational, constantly reaching out and getting involved. God is extroverted.”¹

CONCLUSION

Now, here come the caveats:

I am not talking about people who have medical impairments who prevent them from coming to church.

I am not talking about people who are driving on Sunday morning and use ZOOM to log into church.

I am not talking about people who are able to connect online to an authentic understanding of togetherness through the internet.

Our Livestream, and at churches across America, are here, and it’s here to stay, and it’s a gift and a blessing that we have this tool.

But that tool is merely to replicate or to reimagine the community that exists whenever two or three are gathered together, to model somehow what God experiences in the Trinity.

At St. Timothy’s, I sometimes consider us to happen to have our own Trinity: instead of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. (Here comes the heresy) It’s 8 o’clock, 10 o’clock and 7pm on Saturdays. 3 in one, one in 3. You can add to that our Livestream. That makes 4 in one, one in 4. This complicated interrelationship, this dance under one roof with 2 languages (Spanish and English), with music and without, Rite I and Rite II.

How do we maintain that community? How do we prevent becoming silos? How do we both spiritual and religious? How do we take care of each other?

That’s how the Trinity matters in our lives.

AMEN

¹ [A Few Minutes With... The Rev. Dr. Will Willimon - YouTube](#)