

# Sermons at Saint Paul's

*A Wellspring of spiritual nourishment; A river of service in Jesus' Name*

Trinity Sunday

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This past Lent, the book group which gathers during Lent in individual homes read a book by Richard Rohr. The title of the book is *The Divine Dance-The Trinity And Your Transformation*. On the cover of the book is a picture of an icon which we have a copy at the back of the Church. In this book, Richard argues, among others that the traditional narrative that underpins what has become a monstrous complexity is mainly due to the fact that the Church moved away from a relationship centered understanding of Jesus' presence among humans to a hierarchical God. This God was not only far removed from daily human experience but could be described as an absentee landlord, who emerges only to punish and affect his judgement on people. In his view, for us to experience the Trinity-as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; God has to be the ultimate participant in our lives, the life force in all we do, the pulsating energy between each and every creature, the breath of our joys, the discomfort of our trials, and even in the pain of human suffering. He argues that indeed there is the need for a paradigm shift that acknowledged God as being a part of the dance itself.

For us then, the important task is about re-imagining God to be central to our daily life and work. This re-imagined God is not one where God comes around in the cool of the day and wonders where we are or what we have been up to, but one in which God's intimacy will provide us with an answer to the question of the psalmist. To the psalmist, the question was "What is man that you should be mindful of him?"

To this question, the creation story answers, God created the universe and also created humans in his image. That is why God is mindful of us, that is why God cares for us. For in spite of all our faults, in spite of the fact that you and I are not perfectly loving people, God still loves us because it is only humans with whom God can have a relationship.

The First Letter of John helps us to understand that God demonstrated his love for us in that he sent his son to the world that we might live through him. The ultimate offering is the self-giving love realized in the person of Jesus. This Jesus, who was crucified, buried and now resurrected, stands with his disciples in Galilee, and laying claim to both cosmic and earthly authority, sends the disciples out to announce God's salvation, to bear witness to the end of a broken creation and the beginning of a new creation. Go baptize, go baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he charged the disciples. Go make disciples. Go create a new community. If in the past, we were charged to subdue the earth, this new community is charged with tending creation.

It is this new creation which calls for re-imagining a God who invites each into a community with Christ. Through the gift of baptism each is affirmed by this community as an essential part of it. It is into this community that we welcome Matthew through the sacrament of baptism. It is a community where Jesus becomes my brother, my liberator, my sustaining presence, and my redeemer, and that I trust myself to him in both living and in dying. Within this community, I am not only assured of being found by Christ, but I find myself accepted into his life and history, for by his life, death and resurrection, I conclude that he not only lives and dies for me, but I rise with him. For all who discover for themselves the self-giving love of Jesus, he is not only God's beloved son, he is also the first born within the community. And because we share this community with him, we are not only God's

sons and daughters but we are joint heirs with the one who through his presence among us made this community possible.

The re-imagined God is one we can all call *Abba, Father*. Being in community with Christ means the God of Jesus becomes your God because God revealed Godself in the Jesus with whom you share community because of your baptism. When we address God as *Abba, Father*, we sense Jesus' closeness to us and his closeness to God. To cry *Abba, Father* is to cease to think of the concept of father simply in a family or patriarchal context. To cry *Abba, Father* is to avail ourselves to seeking the kind of unity that Paul prays for a community that identifies itself with Christ "...agree with one another" Paul Says, "live in peace....Greet one another with a holy kiss."

A re-imagined God is one who encourages members of the community of Christ to affirm life in all its fullness and embrace the human desire to live. This community knows of God's healing in times of illness, knows of God's consolation in times of tragedy, senses reconciliation when brokenness occurs and relies on God's abiding presence. This is a community of Christ that is filled with God's spirit and so it builds people up and lifts people up, and for the sake of the community, everyone brings their vital energies and gifts into the life of the community. Each relies on the relationship that is mainly fueled by the presence of God's spirit. The overarching point within this community is the awareness that neither you nor I can establish a community with our individual selves. Neither you nor I can have a relationship with our individual selves. You can love yourself, as many people do. You can hate yourself, as many people do. But you cannot establish a community with yourself because you cannot have a relationship with yourself. You need another person, that is why we hear Jesus assuring us that where two or three are gathered, where there is a community, he is in the midst of them-for that is the place of relationship, that is the place of life because God thrives on relationships.

A re-imagined God generates a re-imagined community. This community doesn't pretend to be all knowing, nor does it pretend to be self-sufficient. It reflects the Son's reliance on the Father through the Holy Spirit.

There is a story of an African engineer who was sent to abroad by his employers to study. Every morning, he will be picked up at his hotel and be taken to the office. But all attempts to teach this man proved futile. Every attempt at teaching was met with this response "as for this, I know already."

One morning, this gentleman woke up and got ready for work, and when he came out to ride the car to work, he was met by a different person who asked that he shouldn't bother about work today. The engineer was shocked to hear that and so he asked why. The gentleman politely told this engineer that it's because you are returning home. The engineer was flabbergasted. What? What do you mean I am returning home? The gentleman politely responded "Well, you know everything. What is it that you do not know? You know everything and so you have to return home so someone who doesn't know may come and learn." The re-imagined community is one which devotes itself to constant learning and prayer because it is keenly aware of its dependence on God's grace and love.

The idea of the Trinity as fashioned by the church fathers was in part to reconnect them and all who had found in themselves a reflection of the God who created them in His image. More importantly, it was an attempt to interpret the history of Jesus Christ as the history of God, and to lift up the depth of unity within the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and provide that as an example for the new community of believers. Remember, just as the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, so are we to be in them. The self-giving and openness of the Son and the Father for each other find their correspondence in their shared openness and self-giving toward all people.

For me, the Trinity is not about numbers, nor is it about a God who is a being among many. It is about a re-imagined community, be it your home, your family,

neighborhood or wherever, but a community which thrives not only because of the grace and love of God, but because of the relationship we build with one another.

Amen.