

“Trinity. It’s like...”ⁱ

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Genesis 1:1-2

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.

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

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.

Have you noticed that pastors talk a lot about love? Love of God for all of creation. Our love for God and for our neighbor. The reason for all this love-talk is that relationship is the #1 most important things there is.

On this Trinity Sunday, we talk about the love of God, usually a safe topic but some of this may be less familiar to you. I used to avoid talking about Trinity because it was... messy... or... at least confusing.

Although Trinity is central to our Christian doctrine, more than one of us have had someone say, “Don’t try to make sense of it. It’s a mystery.” Don’t try? But mysteries are the best things to try to unravel! Because the more you explore a mystery, the more you discover; and the more you discover, the deeper the mystery grows.

Take the mystery of Trinity. We wrestle with it. We listen and pray. And the more we open ourselves to what it would reveal, the more we learn. We never fully “get it;” rather it draws us further in.

When we try to describe God, language fails us. In the same way, when we try to explain Trinity, words cannot capture it. We have to use metaphors and analogies. We say, “The Trinity is like...” or “Think of it this way...” But we cannot fully explain because we never fully know. Because... it is Mystery. Mystery is one of God’s names.

In the first few centuries after Jesus walked the earth, Church leaders reflected on the gospels and prayed. What does Jesus as the Christ mean for our understanding of one God? How do we reshape our theology in light of this revelation? In the 4th century, three Church leaders from Turkey offered the world an intricate, complex understanding that would soon be called Trinity. They had to have known that it would seem strange. But after three centuries of grappling with the problem, the Church needed what they offered. Trinity was the best metaphor people could find.

Basil, Gregory and Gregory, two bishops and a patriarch, called this new way to understand God *perichoresis* which is Greek for circle dance. God, they said, is not nearly a being. Rather God is a radical relatedness, the perfect communion between the three persons of the Trinity, as we call them.

During the first chapel service of my first term in seminary, Martha Postlethwaite spoke about the three persons of the Trinity, dancing together. She had a prop, a statuette of three figures, hands joined, moving to unheard music. Except that two of them unlinked their hands and extended them... to us.

My son Jared gave me Richard Rohr's book, *Divine Dance*, for Christmas. When I unwrapped it, my first thought was I need to update my Amazon wishlist – do I really need more Rohr? But once I began reading, I knew this was exactly what I need if I am to uncover and accept Trinity.

Rohr takes what our seminary chaplain said about the persons of the Trinity dancing, and stretches it. He tells us that “God is not just a dancer; God is the dance itself... a circle dance of love.”ⁱⁱⁱ *Perichoresis*.

Rohr challenges us to recognize that this movement, this flow of God, is reflected in the workings of the cosmos, in the perpetual orbit of electrons, protons, and neutrons. He encourages us to notice with new senses that indeed, everything reflects “the image and likeness of God.” The mystery of Trinity is the ground on which everything exists. And if God has a pattern, this makes sense. Of course, we would find it everywhere.

Do you recall the story in Genesis where God appears to Abraham as three men? Abraham and Sarah offer hospitality – refreshment, food and drink – then Abraham talked with them. In the 15th century, artist Andrei Rublev created an icon of this scene. There is God on the left in gold, the ultimate Source of wholeness. Christ, in the center, is in blue, two fingers extended to indicate his nature, both divine and human. The Spirit, on the right, is in green, symbolizing that everything grows within God's transforming light.

The icon shows the three persons of God enjoying themselves (as much as 15th century art reflects such feelings) eating and drinking, sharing from a common bowl. Thinking again of our Genesis lesson: In the beginning when God is creating, Christ is present as “Light,” and a wind from God (the Spirit) hovers over the chaos. This loving relationship exists from the beginning!

Looking again at Rublev's icon (you can find a poor imitation on the cover of your bulletin), notice that the Spirit's hand is gesturing to an open, fourth place at the table. She seems to be inviting... someone.

Some art historians who have studied this icon indicate that there is a small rectangular hole at the front of the table. They find a glue residue which suggests to them that a mirror may have originally been glued there.

This interpretation suggests that the one in the mirror is invited to join the other three. That there is room at the table for one who looking at the picture. Room for us, and for everyone. What does it mean to you, that you are invited to sit at table with the Holy, to enjoy hospitality and loving friendship with God? It may be that of all the evils in the world, all the terrors, diseases and violence, that the greatest dis-ease we face is our sense of disconnection. Disconnection from God, from ourselves, from each other and from our world. Isolation, for any reason other than safety in pandemic, is bad for our well-being. Disconnection leads to destruction as people stop caring about the ones who are black or queer or far away, stop caring about the earth and the others who share it with us. Disconnection is the sin that leads to a great many evil deeds.

God intends for everyone and everything to be connected in a dance of love. We are created out of and for relationship and connection. Maybe this is what Paul means when he says that God “is not far from us, but is the one in whom we live and move and have our being.”

Humans seem to prefer hierarchies. We are more comfortable with chains of command and leadership pyramids than with circles or spirals. We also tend to expect conformity and uniformity. But when we practice the flow that is demonstrated by Trinity, and by the more natural parts of creation, we experience diversity as the norm. Diversity is God's way. And we continue this practice, we learn to reconnect with God, with self, with others and with the world.

In God, there is no disconnection between George Floyd and the shopkeeper that called the police. No disconnection between the peaceful protestors and the anarchists. We need to ask God to remove the scales from our eyes so that we can see all, connected, as well. Through the centuries, we have tended to ignore this flow that is God because it does not make easy sense. There is no room for either/or, or insiders and outsiders. No room for divisions or partisanship. No room for taking sides. Trinity means three, together, endlessly moving, endlessly loving.

Are you familiar with the fidget spinner? Or maybe an old-fashioned pinwheel? Each of these has obvious fins. When it is still, we see them. But when the pinwheel or the fidget spinner is in motion, we can only see an unbroken blur of movement. This brings me to my final point.

As much as we might talk about the qualities of Heavenly Parent versus Christ versus God as Spirit, the movement, or the flow, between them is what is most important. When we accept Trinity, we begin to perceive that God is a verb more than a noun. Rather than a heavenly being sitting on a throne somewhere, God is movement and experience. Connection and relationship. In what ways does this idea affect the way you think of God? If God is reflected through a specific type of movement that exists throughout the cosmos as well as within your very being, what does this mean for the way you view yourself... or others? What does it mean for the way you view the earth?

What does it mean to you that from the very beginning, God is – not just love but – relationship?

Amen.

ⁱ For this message, I am using ideas found in the first few chapters of: Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (Whitaker House: 2016).

ⁱⁱ Richard Rohr, "Trinity: Part One. Trinity: MIA," May 5, 2019, cac.org/trinity-mia-2019-05-05/ (last viewed on May 3, 2020) based upon Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*, 26-27.