

Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2009

St. Peter's Church, Glenside. Parish Picnic with Annunciation BVM

In the name of the one God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. Amen

Today we celebrate an enigmatic mathematical mystery called the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It is the only observance in the Anglican Church calendar dedicated to a doctrine, a belief, rather than a person or an event.

The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to do the impossible, to express the inexpressible, to put into words human experience of the ineffable God. There's a story St. Augustine of Hippo tells about himself that during the time he was working on his magnum opus, *De Trinitas*, he went walking on the seashore one day and came across a lad who had dug a hole in the sand and was going back pouring buckets of water from the ocean into the hole. Augustine watched him for a while. Back and forth, back and forth the boy went lugging the heavy buckets of water and pouring them into the hole in the sand. Finally Augustine, out of deep curiosity asked the boy what he was doing. "I am going to empty the ocean into this hole in the sand" said the boy. Flabbergasted, Augustine responded, "You can never do that!" The lad replied, "Nor can you pour the mystery of the Holy Trinity into words in a book." Well, it's a fanciful story but it makes the point. God is, by definition, beyond our comprehension. How can we understand or articulate the inner nature of God?

So having said that, I'll pour out a few bucketsful of Trinitarian doctrine for you. Here, in brief, is what I understand the doctrine of the trinity to be saying:

1. We have seen and experienced the glory and grandeur of God's creation – the beauty of earth and sky and sea - and so we say "I believe in God the Creator." **AND**
2. We know the One who walked among us two thousand years ago, and somehow built a bridge between the Human and the Divine. And so we say "I believe in Jesus Christ". **AND**
3. We know the power of God's Spirit in our lives, here in this present moment, within us and among us, giving us power to do God's will and comfort when we are troubled. And so we say "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

AND at the same time we affirm, together with our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters, that there is **really only one God**, not three. So the doctrine of the Trinity is simply an attempt on the part of the early Christian Church to hold onto this paradox: to emphasize the oneness - the unity - of God, and **at the same time**, to articulate three different human experiences of that one God.

But this morning I want to reflect on another aspect of this trinitarian metaphor.

What I have come to understand, principally from the writings of theologian Elizabeth Johnson, is that God's nature **is community**. None of the three aspects of the Trinity exist independent of the other. Each needs the other two to be complete. And you and I, being created in the image and likeness of God, are incomplete unless we are in community with one another and with the Divine.

We are created by Community, we are created in Community, we are created for community.

Further, diversity is built into our understanding of the nature of God. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that within the unity of the one God, there is diversity. And a part of what it means to say that we are created in the image of God is that we are all different. Part of what makes us God-like is that we are not all the same. Thank God!

The African word UBUNTU, made known to the Western World by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, expresses this reality. Bishop Tutu defines UBUNTU as "I am because you are." UBUNTU. Being in community is intrinsic to the very nature of what it means to be human. We are all interdependent. Our welfare, indeed our very existence depends on each other. St. Paul says: The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." We need each other.

- The American can not say to the African, "I don't need you."
- The Sunni can not say to the Shia "I don't need you",
- The Rich can not say to the poor, "I don't need you."
- The straight can not say to the gay person "I don't need you."
- The Democrat can not say to the Republican "I don't need you."

We're all different and we are all in this together, thank God. And we're all responsible **for** each other and **to** each other.

We human beings participate in the Community of God, the Communion of God. Or, to use one of Richard Rohr's favorite metaphors, we are invited into the Divine Dance. It's a dynamic

metaphor because God is dynamic, active, involved. And God invites us into the dance of love. We are invited to participate in the joyful work of God. We are called, to build bridges and to take the risk of tearing down walls.

We know that we are not complete without God. And, in a sense, God is not complete without us, because you and I are the hands of God doing God's work in God's world! We are called to be co-creators with God, to build bridges across the chasms that separate us, to break down the walls that divide us from one another, to be instruments for the healing of the world community. To bring unity – not uniformity but unity – in the midst of our wondrous diversity.

It is for this reason that St. Peter's has invited the people of Annunciation to join us this morning. To celebrate our diversity **and** our unity. Because we need each other in order to be complete. You and I and every human being is a part of the human community which reflects the very nature of God.

Now I invite you to hold hands with someone or put your arm around someone and pray with me the thanksgiving for diversity of races and cultures which is printed in your leaflet on page ____.

O God, who created all peoples in your image, we thank you for the wonderful diversity of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.