

Holy Trinity A 04 June 2023
Matthew 28:16-20
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you in the name of God; the Holy, Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' Let's pray: ...

Who is the one true God? When trying to explain God, especially God as Trinity, three persons, one God, we always risk saying more than we can really ever know or comprehend. Just try getting your head around the Athanasian Creed and you'll see what I mean. It's the temptation every preacher struggles with. More often than not our analogies for the Trinity give way to heresies, the three and the one become a nonsensical, mathematical riddle, and the Blessed Trinity loses meaning and substance in our daily lives. That's not because the Trinity is unimportant or irrelevant. It's because the deepest and most important things in our life can rarely, if ever, be explained satisfactorily. They can only ever be experienced.

As an exercise, think for a moment how you'd try to define your love for a particular person, and list the reasons why you love that one person above everyone else. I reckon you'd struggle as much I would and, at best, cobble together a list of worn out cliches. You'll very quickly exhaust ways to describe things in words. No list is long enough and after a while the reasons begin to sound hollow and empty. Describe for me the most beautiful day of your life. Maybe it was sitting in the silence of a sunset or the day your child was born. The colours and feelings, though real, sound trite compared to the reality of the moment you were swallowed up by that beauty. Tell me about the deepest joy or tragedy of your life. Tell me the story. The facts may be accurate but words can never contain the fullness of the joy, the tragedy, the emotion. At most they point to it.

When it comes to speaking about the most profound, meaningful, and life-changing things or events of our lives, words just don't cut it. They only seem to trivialise occasions. So it is with God. Perhaps that's why in today's gospel Jesus doesn't try to explain or define the Trinity. Instead, he speaks of relationship and participation. Human beings, all nations, the entire world, are to be baptised, plunged, washed, immersed in the name, that is, the qualities and characteristics of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. St Paul describes these as grace, love, and communion. At the end of his second letter, he entrusts the Corinthians not so much to what God does, but to how God is. God's being is the eternal Trinity. That being is the basis for God's doing. And it's true for us too.

We were created to participate in and share the life of the Holy Trinity. It's our spiritual DNA. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26). Trinitarian life is the pattern from which we were created. It's both the basis and destination of our lives. The Trinitarian life is a choreography of love; three equal persons, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each one dwelling in the other by virtue of a fluid and unceasing flow of mutual love.

Our lives, marriages, families, schools, workplaces, parishes and congregations, are to become images of the Triunity of God. And that's what brings me humbly to my knees, dear Saints; that we're invited to join this dance of mutuality and love. Whenever we see the world through someone else's eyes, whenever the joys and sorrows of others become our own, whenever we completely give ourselves to the needs of others, holding nothing back, whenever we open ourselves to receive unconditionally the life of other people, whenever we both lose and find our life in the life of others, then we are most authentically representing God's image.

You see this in those rare married couples who live and love as one without ever losing their distinct uniqueness as two persons. Together they manifest divine love and reveal God's life in this world. Ultimately, Trinitarian life isn't a mathematical equation to solve. It's not a quantity; rather, a quality, a way of being in relationship. It's that kind of relationship with others that allows us to say, "I love, therefore I am."

This way of life isn't some dreamy, fairy-tale ideal. It's one of practical service and active compassion. There's no subordination within Trinitarian relationships. The Triunity of God is manifest in our struggles against injustice, oppression, and exploitation. It's the basis for living sacrificially in and for the lives of others. A child who cares for an ageing parent with love, compassion, and self-giving demonstrates Triune love. Similarly, the Trinity reveals what true parenthood looks like. The Triunity of God shows the way to find unity with others, not in spite of our diversity and complexity, but because of our diversity and complexity.

The image of God in humanity is Trinitarian. It's in every one of you. The divine image offers a life with God and others that is relational, personal, participatory, co-operative, communal, and loving. This is the life for which we were created. It's the truest pattern of who we are and how we are to live. To turn away from others, to withdraw our life from others, to live in isolation, to exclude other people, declaring that we have no need of them, are the most unnatural and un-godlike things we do.

Our love for one another and our faith in the Holy Trinity are intimately connected. You can't have one without the other. An authentic confession of faith in the Triune God can only be made when we show mutual love for one another. Our love for one another expresses the wholeness of God's life as Holy Trinity - "if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12b; see also Matthew 22:34-40 *The Greatest Commandment*). Trinitarian faith is central and gives meaning to our love for others.

Beware, however. This isn't easy. It's dangerous to live a Trinitarian faith. It involves love, vulnerability, openness to others, self-giving, sharing and participating in one another's lives such that we become one. That's how Christ lived and died. That's the resurrected, ascended, and "pentecosted" life Christ reveals and offers us. It's how we're to be and live. You won't be surprised to hear that our culture neither recognises nor rewards this kind of life. To the world it looks like weakness and dependency. In God's world, however, it looks like holiness. Humanity is most authentically itself when it participates in and manifests the divine life. In the second century, St Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is the human person fully alive."*

Every Sunday, we confess in the Creed our belief in God who is Trinity. We confess the oneness of God as well as the uniqueness of the three persons. And as baptised children of God, we are called to participate in this divine oneness; this holy dance. Friends, we will fail, sometimes spectacularly, and fall short of God's glory. But that's okay as long as we remember to whom we belong, confess our shortcomings and persevere. What's important is that we never give up striving to be who God created us to be and in whose image we were created and are loved. When we fall, we pick ourselves up and go again, secure in the knowledge that Christ covers our blemishes and makes us perfectly justified and holy for his own sake.

Every moment, every circumstance, every relationship is one in which we can make real and visible the divine life and love of the Holy Trinity. That's the human vocation. It's what we were created for and to do. It's the most natural and godlike thing we ever do.

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

And then “God blessed them” (Genesis 1:28).

And the peace of God, Father, Son†, and Holy Spirit, will keep your hearts and minds safe for the sake of Christ Jesus who is with us always, to the end of the age. Amen.

*The voice of St Irenaeus is a remote echo of the age of the Apostles. He was a disciple of St Polycarp, himself a disciple of St John the Evangelist. Irenaeus was born in Smyrna, Asia Minor/Izmir, Turkey, in the first half of the 2nd century and was martyred when Bishop of Lugdunum, Gaul/Lyon, France at the turn of the 3rd century AD.

His quote, “The glory of God is the human person fully alive”, expresses his desire for humanity to understand the full implication of God incarnate - actual flesh and blood in the exact same way we are — in Jesus Christ. Our body is a sacred gift.

In Ephesians [3:18,19], St Paul says, “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” What is “the fullness of God”? One way to think of it is that Paul is praying that we will be more and more filled with...GOD. The more we are filled with God, the more we are filled with life (since God is the source of life [Genesis 1]) and the more we are filled with love (since God is love [1 John 4:8]). The more we are filled with God, the more we are filled with peace, patience, kindness, compassion, generosity, joy and every gift of the Holy Spirit. To be “fully alive” is to be filled with all the fullness of God. Jesus came and showed us what being “fully alive” looks like—and our mission is to live like Jesus!