



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Trinity Sunday (C)

#### Communitas

[RCL] Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8 or Canticle 13 (or Canticle 2); Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

Bob Dorough, teaching about the number “3” on Schoolhouse Rock, used to sing:

*Three is a magic number.  
Somewhere in the ancient, mystic trinity  
You get three as a magic number.  
The past and the present and the future,  
Faith, hope, and charity,  
Give you three.  
A man and a woman had a little baby, yes, they did.  
They had three in the family.  
That's a magic number.*

Three makes a family. A family is a small community. Community: from the Latin “*communitas*,” commonly referring to an unstructured community in which people are equal. A root understanding of community then is an unstructured group in which the people, or in the case of the Trinity, the *personae*, are equal. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then, can be seen as such a family or community in which the essence of the community is that the three are equal. Or, as we take some liberty with that equality, they are One.

Those third- and fourth-century Christians who were under command to make some creedal assertions about the nature of Christian *communitas* referred to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as *personae*, as in a Greek play in which a single actor assumes the *persona* of two, or three, or more characters simply by changing masks – masks that represent the various characters the actor is playing. Those hammering out the creeds adopted as a metaphor the language of the theater, that artistic discipline which at its very core plumbs the diverse depths of human nature in story and narrative.

So here, in our creeds and our theology, the single actor (God) is capable and has been perceived, and experienced in history, as having three basic, somewhat distinct *personae* or characteristics: that of a nurturing Father; a Son who lives and acts among us as a representative of the essence of the Father; the

Holy Spirit which sustains the actions of the Son as an ongoing essence of who we are, both as individuals and as a community of the Father and the Son.

Paul, in his letter to the emerging church in Rome, recognizes this when writing that the peace, or *shalom*, of God, is present in the Christian *communitas* because God's essence, which is love, has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That is, in Christ, we become a community of God's love in all that we say and all that we do.

In this sense, what we call Trinity is the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit infusing those of us who dare to call ourselves Christian with the Love of God. At the same time, these *personae* of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are, in a sense, a *communitas*, or family of three. The famous Rublev icon depicts this family seated around an altar, somewhat androgynous in that all three have long hair tied back with a long braid down their backs. In the background is a tree, perhaps the tree in the original garden, perhaps the tree upon which hung the world's salvation, perhaps the tree of the renewed and resurrected garden imagined by the revelation of St. John of Patmos, with the crystal river flowing through the middle of the city, with trees from which hang the leaves for the healing of nations.

When we try to speak of God, the God who has created all that is seen and unseen, a universe of some 14 billion years of light and love, we have no choice but to speak in metaphor. We speak of past, present, and future as a way of describing what we mean by "time." This does not really give us a full picture and understanding of time; it doesn't account for perceptions like when time seems to stand still or speed up. Certain times dissolve us into tears, other times give us great joy. Past, present, and future, then, gives us a framework to help us understand part of what time is.

Ritually, we speak of this family or community of love as "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Others call these three *personae* "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer." Former Presiding Bishop Michael Curry sometimes invokes the "Loving, liberating, and life-giving God." The New Zealand Prayer Book describes our God as "Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, and Life-giver." All are attempts to describe this sacred Family: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A family, and yet a unity. Three experiences or co-equal essences of the One God.

The deeper truth of it all is that the revelation of God is not dogma, not theology, not a doctrine, not a creed – not even a belief. For us, the revelation of God is a person – Jesus Christ, a person whose every story and teaching gives us some deep truth about the life, love, and will of our God. Jesus reflects the very truth of creation – creation that is not static but ever unfolding with newness and more diversity. Things yet unseen come into being. And if we let ourselves enter into the diversity of God's Triune Being, we learn that we are ever-changing, just as the whole universe constantly coming into being.

Paul tries to sum this up when he writes, “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.... the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:11-5). This gift of the very Spirit of God’s love constantly transforms us into a community that reflects God’s love. Of course, as important as is the giving of this gift, so is the receiving. Like all of creation which continues to unfold, when we allow ourselves to receive the love of God that the Spirit pours into our hearts, we become love made new.

One last name for this community of love we call “Trinity” was coined by Evelyn Underhill, someone who wrote extensively on the mystery of God. She calls the Trinity “The School of Charity.” As Paul also wrote to the Corinthians, “Faith, hope, and charity, abide these three – but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13). We who are created in the image of God – *imago Dei* – are to become those people who abandon self-love and the greed and acquisition that grows out of such self-love, and become more like Jesus, God’s divine charity in human flesh and blood. We are to become a giving, sharing, self-emptying community of God’s divine charity, sharing the unending, unqualified love of our creator with all people and all nations, especially with all those who are utterly unlike ourselves. We are to be students of the Trinity so that we may become the School of Charity, a *communitas* of equals, and like the Trinity, ever-changing, yet the same, as a community of love. Forever and ever. Amen.

***The Rev. Kirk Alan Kubicek** has had the privilege of writing for Sermons That Work almost from its inception. He is currently priest-in-charge of a Small But Mighty congregation in the Diocese of Maryland: Christ Church Forest Hill, Rock Spring Parish. Kubicek just celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, and is still running or walking with weights every morning, writing poetry, and playing music. He is in his eleventh year playing drums and harmonica for On The Bus, a Grateful Dead tribute band in the DC/Baltimore Metro region. He just welcomed his third grandchild into the world and loves every minute of being Papi K. Life is good in Christ’s Beloved Community! All shall be well, all shall be well, all manner of thing shall be well.*