



SERMONS THAT WORK

Trinity Sunday (A)

Worship the Unity

[RCL] Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Today is Trinity Sunday, which might also be interpreted as Unity Sunday. Not to be confused with conformity or sameness, unity is, of course, impossible to create without generosity, love, and humility in inevitable conflict. The Trinity itself is an example of the tension, beauty, and mystery of unity. In the collect today, we pray to “acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity.” As Christians, we *worship* the Unity. What does worshipping the unity look like in our lives, church, and world?

Unity does not mean sameness. If God wanted sameness, God would not have created the world as it is created. Look around the room and notice the differences you have between your neighbor, even if it is someone related to you. Our entire origin story, the creation of the universe, starts with sameness: “Darkness covered the face of the deep.” And it ends with rest in a kaleidoscope of diversity.

God allowed light to mingle with darkness. God created sky to complement water. God created sun and stars – two different methods! – to give light to the world. God allowed creatures of all kinds – *all* kinds, have you ever *seen* a blobfish? – to populate the oceans and the sky and the land. The scripture says that God created every living creature that moves of every kind, and winged birds of every kind, and everything that creeps of every kind. Every kind and all kinds. To humankind, God said, “Be fruitful and multiply.” And God knew, God must have known, that to be fruitful and multiply would continue and expand God’s example of diversity. God knew that our children, even children born of the same parents, would be different. That trees and plants and creatures would change and evolve over eons and context and climate. That all that lives and breathes might also create and explore and discover. We do not worship a God of sameness. We worship a God of unity.

The Holy Trinity is an example of this kind of unity: different, mysterious, communal, relational. Each element of the Trinity can be described as a different identity, but the answer to “How many Gods do we worship?” is always “One.” You may have heard some of the myriad ways our tradition has described the three souls of God. You may have explored your own. The most orthodox is “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Also common in the prayerbook: “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.” Presiding Bishop Curry is fond of “Loving, liberating and life-giving God.” The New Zealand Prayer Book describes God as “Earth-

maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver.” There are metaphors about ice, water, and vapor. What other ways might you begin to understand the divine mystery of the Trinity?

The members of the Trinity are decidedly distinct. You may find yourself relating to one more than the others in different seasons of your life. Who do you relate to today, this beginning of Pentecost? Is it the creator of the universe, the one who brought all things into being? Is it our sibling Jesus, the Christ who walked, cried, laughed, got angry and dusty and hungry alongside us? Is it the mystery of the Spirit, the tongues of fire that burned on the disciples and burns still in you and me?

In the reading from the Gospel of Matthew today, we zoom into a moment where Jesus is commissioning his disciples to make more disciples. He tells them, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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.” Jesus sends them to *all* nations, knowing full well that each nation is saturated in its own context, culture, language, tradition, and family systems. That is, each nation is different. By uniting different nations into following one Christ, Jesus is inviting the church into tension, into relationship, into the juiciness of difference. But he commands his disciples to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit— another community that contains tension, relationship, and juiciness of difference.

In God’s very essence as the Trinity, God models unity, not sameness. As the Council of Nicaea declared, and we affirm in the Nicene Creed, both the human Jesus and God the Parent are “of the same substance.” All disciples, of every tribe, tongue, and nation, are baptized in the name of the same Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And among each of them is the power of the Christ, to the end of the age.

Because God created the world with diversity, not sameness, because Jesus walked alongside people of all backgrounds and wounds because the Spirit is in all of us – and even went so far as to communicate in languages of all kinds at Pentecost – God understands difference. God understands relationship. God understands community. God understands diversity.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes that the members should “agree with one another, live in peace... greet one another with a holy kiss.” It’s a lovely image, a community at peace and in agreement. He undoubtedly wrote this encouragement because things *were not so* in the church. Divisions, opinions, personalities, and traditions so easily divide us, creating a community with tension and conflict instead of peace and agreement. We are not a people of sameness, and that often creates conflict.

As Christians of diversity, it can be easy to claim that God is on our side, especially when we find friends who agree with us. It takes humility to engage with and allow ourselves to be transformed by someone different than us, to posture ourselves with enough vulnerability to greet someone across the aisle with a holy kiss. In an episode of “This American Life,” the host says, “Free speech doesn’t solve conflict, it actually creates it. Solving conflict requires more advanced tools like trust, humility, dialogue, and listening.”

God gave us freedom, and so God allowed conflict. God-made relationships and diversity create conflict, and that's alright. But to achieve harmony and relationship, we need openness, listening, and love. What did Jesus preach, live, and teach? Relationship. What does the Holy Spirit move us to do? Relationship. And what does the Creator inspire over and over us in the accounts of the divine? Relationship. The Holy Trinity creates, models, and exists in community, just as we ought to do as Trinitarian Christians.

The goal of Christian community, of religion, is unity, not sameness. It's really easy to have *just enough* religion to condemn other people, claim a monopoly on God, believe in a God who only acts in the ways we think is best. It's a lot harder to have enough religion that allows us to open up to one another, allows us to grow and be transformed in the experience of difference that may be awkward or contain conflict. And it takes a whole lot of religion to live a life of Godly love. How much religion do you have?

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