

Trinity Sunday-The Rev. Diana Peters 6.12.22

A couple of days ago, I celebrated an anniversary. On June 9th, twenty-six years ago, I was first ordained -- to the transitional diaconate first, and then, six months later, to the priesthood. It's a time for remembering for me -- remembering my own ordination, remembering discovering what it means to be an ordained person, remembering the remarkable ways that God's call to ministry has unfolded itself during these last 26 years.

And as I sat down to write this sermon, my anniversary brought to mind one other thing -- those first five years of ministry, when I was an Associate serving under two wonderful rectors who worked very hard to prepare me to have a church of my own someday.

I also remember that during those five years, I was given five Trinity Sunday sermons to preach. Oh, how I dreamed of the day, when I would grow up and become a rector and have my own associate to whom I could give that Trinity Sunday sermon. And here I am, 26 years later, still preaching the Trinity Sunday sermon!

Seriously though, I like preaching about the Trinity. I like tackling how to speak of the mystery of one God, in Three Persons. The truth is, I don't think anyone can really understand the Trinitarian mystery such that they can explain it adequately. Oh there have been some gallant tries. Take for example, the Athanasian Creed. It's in your prayer book, if you're curious. But in case you haven't perused that fine document lately, let me give you a short snippet of its Trinitarian clarity:

"We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance... "Such is the Father, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. . . And yet they are not three incomprehensibles . . . but one incomprehensible." As an unidentified British writer once quipped, "the whole thing -- incomprehensible, designed by theologians to baffle us." So we must conclude, that if we want to understand the Trinity, even the Creeds aren't much help.

And I don't think we can look to science or logic. Mathematically, the trinity is impossible ($1+1+1=1$?). It doesn't make sense. We say we are monotheistic, we believe in one God, but then a few minutes later we speak of our belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Far greater minds than mine have tried to explain the Trinity in a way that we mere mortals could understand. St. Patrick, it is said, used the shamrock to illustrate the nature of the Trinity -- three distinct leaves, yet only one plant. Personally, I like the water image that someone came up with. Water, we know, exists on this earth in three forms: gas, liquid, and solid (ice). Three forms, one substance, right? And other people have used other clever illustrations:

There's the pigtail, an image given to us by the British essayist Sara Maitland, where three strands of hair are interwoven to form one braid. All three are necessary to the wholeness of the braid, yet each strand is an individual entity in and of itself. All strands are formed of the same

substance, yet only in their intertwined relationship do they form the pigtail. Does that clear it up for you?

Most of the wisest theologians, however, just give up. John Wesley gave up. He said, "Tell me how it is that in this room there are three candles but one light, and I will explain to you the mode of the Divine existence."

Martin Luther also gave up: "This article of the Trinity is so far above the power of the human mind to grasp or the tongue to express, that God, as Father of his children, will [surely] pardon us when we lisp as best we can."

So maybe we too should give up trying to understand the Trinity. It seems a futile pursuit, after all. And we all know that it's not necessary to understand something in order to believe in it or benefit from it. I don't understand the combustion engine of my car, but I certainly appreciate getting here nearly effortlessly in only about 30 minutes this morning. Or take love for an example. It's not so easy to explain, is it? And yet, I believe in it.

Maybe in the long run, the only way the church can ever hope to understand the triune nature of God is for us to accept that it is so, and if so, then the real question becomes, "How can we be in relationship with our 3-in-1 God?"

Well, one thing I do sense about the Trinity is that it is somehow a divine model of a relationship that is in perfect unity. And unity is surely something this world could stand to learn more about. In fact, could it be possible that in emulating the relationship model of the Triune God, we could begin to incarnate the character of Father, Son and Holy Spirit into our own lives, both as individuals and as church?

It sounds great, but how would we do that? How can we develop relationships so that all aspects of the Divine are glorified?

Joanna Macy, an educator, ecologist and author, suggests three directions we can take, each of which involves incarnating one aspect of the Trinity.

1) To incarnate God the Creator: Work with what is at hand. What has the Creator God given you that is all around you. We waste an awful lot of time wishing we just had more resources or different talents and gifts. But our Creator God worked with dirt to create human life. Maybe we have exactly what we need right at our fingertips but just haven't noticed it or we've undervalued it.

2) To incarnate the Redeemer, God the Son: Jesus, we know, became human so he could correct our understanding of God and God's love for us. And as a result, Jesus suffered a hideous death, one that was designed to inflict the greatest pain imaginable. Macy suggests that perhaps we, who have all experienced pain in our lives, might learn to work with our pain; work through our pain; give our pain a purpose; as Jesus did, and work with others who are in pain. Recognize where you have been so that you will know where others have been. Like Christ, you bear wounds where you have been broken. You have learned and grown in your stages of healing and

are becoming and have become whole. And in God's economy, nothing is ever wasted. Even pain, can be a blessing that will help ourselves and others.

3) To incarnate God the Holy Spirit: She suggests that the whole world will benefit when we work with our particular passion. Ask yourself, what do you care about? What makes your heart sing? What gets you outside yourself and into the world? That is the gift of the Holy Spirit that you are intended to use in your ministry to the world. God doesn't just give us a calling, you know. The Holy Spirit also gives us the passion and a will to accomplish it.

The Blessed Holy Trinity may not be understood clearly, but we have known each one of its Persons, intimately. When we see the flowers of spring appear after the long, cold winter, or see a newborn baby animal, or bird, or are handed our own newborn child or grandchild, we can sense God the Creator' genius and love revel in the mystery of God the Creator.

Likewise, when we are suffering the pains of life, experiencing the sorrows of loss or disappointment, we should know that Jesus, the son of God, took on humanity himself, to know what agonies we suffer and to be with us in the worst of our pain.

And finally, we know we all have our own gifts and talents. When we are able to bring peace into a crisis, or teach a youngster to play music, or argue a case where there has been injustice, know that it's the Holy Spirit who has breathed into us the abilities, the passion, and the courage to provide comfort, support, and even joy exactly where it is needed in the world.

So, happy Trinity Sunday. Celebrate today, even though you may not understand why. As they say in American Sign Language: 3 in 1. And know this – whether God is One or God is Three, God IS. And that's all that really matters. Amen.