

June 11 2017

Reading from the Bible Genesis 1:1-2:4b

Sermon

Happy Trinity Sunday, well now I expect you would not find cards at Wal-Mart for a happy Trinity Sunday card although if they thought there was money in it, they would do it. A lot of churches don't celebrate it. As a rule, I don't usually celebrated Trinity Sunday although it is a Sunday designed in most Christian Calendars as a day to give thanks to God as the Creator, sustainer and redeemer. The word trinity absolutely does not appear anywhere in the Bible. Most Christian churches find this word helpful to explain what we mean by the trinity. This morning I want to refer to two Scriptures. The first verses are the very beginnings in chapter one in Genesis.

Genesis 1:1-2:4

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

I want to be sure that you caught that, the spirit of God or the wind of God, *ruach*-Hebrew or *pneuma*- Greek that means the breath and spirit of God. And then we have another creation story in the Gospel of John in chapter one. These words also, appeared in our Call to Worship.

John 1:1-5

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Now for John, the word, with a capital W is Jesus. Jesus is the word, the same word that Jesus spoke everything in the creation and there was nothing not created by Jesus-God. Try to explain how God, Jesus, and spirit are all one but are separate is a mystery. If I was going to exactly tell you how to settle that whole issue today, I wouldn't because I couldn't. Over the centuries the church has tried very hard to explain the mystery of the Trinity. I have to admit that the older I get, the more I appreciate that mystery in the Bible. Everything is not complete cut and dried; everything is not completely lined out and spelled out. There are still many aspects of God that we hold in awe and wonder of how things work out.

The baptism of Jesus, as you remember the story when he went to John the Baptist to be baptized. It is one of the places where Christians point out the Trinity. The Trinity is-Jesus as a human being who came to the river-the dove was the Holy Spirit (in the story the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove came down from Heaven upon Jesus) so those two are separate- and then God spoke from heaven and said, "This is my Son, my Beloved." It is an example of another relationship. So what do we make of this? How do we pray? When we say O Lord hear our prayers, who are we praying to? How does this work out? Sometimes churches, especially today get much focused that only to Jesus is the one that we pray to yet when we pray to Jesus we pray to God the father, the Creator, and we pray to the spirit because they are in perfect unity. Don't ask me to explain that either.

In the Great commission which Jesus gave to his disciples, he said, "Go, make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. "And then Jesus said, "I will be with you until the end of time." And yet he talked about I and the Father are one (he means we are in each other) and now I pray that you will be in him. It is enough to give you a headache trying to do a flow chart of this or to draw a diagram that will be rational and educational. Our language is so inadequate.

I use the word Father as that is the word that Jesus used for God for his relationship with God. But God also had many, many other names such as, the One who is all sufficient; God is our strength; God is our redeemer and others. From earliest days, the church had tried to explain how the three fit together. They could not be intimately connected like a board of directors or as a committee moderators who meets regularly and shares what has gone on in their committee. They are in perfectly unity and they are knowledgeable about all the work of each other. I read something this week that I have not thought of but that makes a lot of sense, in the Old Testament people were getting to know God, they didn't know Jesus. They knew that the Holy Spirit drops down here and there for specific circumstances or for empowerment of certain individuals. They knew that God's spirit moves across the face of the earth but they are pretty much concerned with just getting to know God.

And then when we come to the New Testament that shifts and we have Jesus. Jesus came to show us the very best God, his love and his care. Jesus calls him Father and said, "I am in him and he is in me" What I say is what he told me to say" Then we have a new picture of Jesus in John's Gospel. He said, Jesus was there at Creation and nothing was created that Jesus wasn't part of. Here we have this Word (Jesus) made flesh incarnate- (became a human being). And then in the book of Acts as Jesus promised, suddenly the Holy Spirit appears to teach and to remind believers. Here is the Holy Spirit and he falls on everybody. And all were praising God their own language. So we now have the era of the Holy Spirit and

we learn more about it in the New Testament. So we are now slowly understanding who God is and how they point to each other.

Now I am going to introduce some “show and tell” that I used to describe the Trinity when I did Christian Ed. I brought my Shamrock plant from my house. It is very easy to see the three parts of the leaf and yet it is one leaf. The story is that St Patrick took a Shamrock leaf and said, “These leaves with three parts are on one stem and so the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are one” And that is one of the objects that show the Trinity. And then there is the egg (I can see the Trustees are already groaning about cleaning up the church) I only dropped a couple of shells. The egg has a shell- the white of the egg and I know you will trust me without tearing the egg apart with my teeth- the yolk. They are all necessary to make up an egg and the three parts fit together perfectly. I learned a new one this week and it was a napkin. The napkin has one fold, two folds, three folds and it is still only one napkin. That was a Celtic description of the Trinity. And the one most famous example is—water- when frozen becomes-ice- water boiled becomes steam but it is still H₂O. So you can see explaining, the trinity to children and adults is not easy. Traditionally we think of Communion—as unity—as conversation – as being all equal.

We are very hierarchically; we want to know who is at the head of the food chain. We want to know who is in charge—no one is in charge in the Trinity because no one needs to be in charge. All the members work together and they are held together by the love that circulates around God. That love is so fervently that it flows out from the Trinity and engulfs us and informs us into a relationship and of fellowship that is equal.

Many of you have probably read the book The Shack that I found was fascinating. C.S. Lewis talked about that movement and understanding of understanding each other. It is as if they are in a dance and they are careful choreographed and each one. I am not a very good dancer; I am terrible at line dancing I have trouble keeping track of things in square dancing. The Holy Spirit, God, and Jesus are much better at it because they know what is going on inside each other and it is a joyous unity. It is not a sterile unity.

For some reason as I was growing up I had this strong sense that there was something very important about the Trinity. I think it was the working of the spirit when I discovered some of the issues in the Celtic spirituality I was just fascinated with it. The idea resonated that there was a virtual force of God and Jesus. It was really exciting and it wasn't just a topical setting. In a website I found a former Seminary colleague of mine who I think is now in New Zealand and a wonderful writer. She writes about the Celtic ideas with enthusiasm, joy, and wonder of the great truth that we can't understand everything about God and we don't need to do know everything... Isn't that great and as I learn more and more

we don't have to have it all together. Last Sunday afternoon as I listened to the prayers of the three women as they lit the three candles representing the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, I remember that all of the Trinity is on our side----all of them are on our side to help us to be in unity and to be one.

The image of three in the Trinity is found in this prayer:

Three folds of the cloth
But only one napkin is there.
Three joints of the finger
But still only one finger.
Three leaves of the Shamrock
But only one stem.
Ice, water and steam
Their origin share.
Three persons in God
But only one God alone.
To make our prayer.

I find that poem very attractive and not so complicated. When we pray we don't have to think about exactly who we are praying to- God-the Father-God the Son-God the Holy Spirit.

Those of you who are architects or builders know the strength of the triangle. The Romans figured that out in their roads and buildings and the Egyptians figured that out in their levers. Probably the strongest structure is the triangle and here we are worshipping a triangle God-God- the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. So why should we bother with the Trinity? So why are you sitting through a sermon about theology that people have debated for over 2,000 years and still have made no final decision? Why are we talking about the Trinity when some Christian Churches absolutely do not believe in the Trinity because that word is not in the Bible? Well, in our church in all facets of our history and in our creed starts with the fact that we believe in God, in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. So somewhere along the way somebody thought this was a good idea and I think I the Trinity is important as it makes sense of the relationship of the parts of God. Some people say we worship one God like the Muslims and the Buddhist. They believe in one God and they are monotheistic. And at some point, they say out then we must believe in three Gods. No, we don't believe in three Gods. We explain how we experience God as the creator, as Jesus the redeemer, and the Holy Spirit. We experience God in the full measure. I believe we do need more mystery in our lives. (Not the mystery about when my check book will balance) (Not mystery why prices in one store are double in another store) no—but the mystery about how Great Thou Art- (how great God is) and stand back in awe. The poem we read was part of a play I had for the children in North Seattle. I was working on it in North

Bend and it was in time of the Persoid Shower (shower of shooting stars)—and I thought about God how “majestic is thy name in all the earth”. We worship an awesome God, creator, a redeemer savior who walks with us day by day.

There is also a sense of balance in the Trinity. Some people do believe they can worship God by being outside. I believe the community is important and the Trinity tells us that. You and I do better when we are together. It gives us a richer prayer life. All three persons in the God-Head hear my prayers. So if I pray to Jesus, the spirit and God, they all hear that prayer. I get the strength and the wisdom from all three. There is a little Celtic prayer that is mentioned in friend’s website: “O Father- who cares O Son who bought me and O Holy Spirit who taught me.”

And finally this all comes directly from some of the Celtic experiences. The Celtic folks had a terrible life. They lived close to nature and they also were under constant threat of invasion by Vikings and other tribes. All forces that was bigger and more powerful than them. Their enemies took their live; they threaten their land; took their languages; their culture; their institutions and their beliefs. There are two kinds of people in history-those who do things to others and those who have things done to them. The Celts fall into the second category. They had lives of oppression, and suffering but they rose above it. You want to read an interesting book, *How The Irish Saved Civilization*. It is a fantastic book about how they preserved much of what we know about Christianity during the Dark Ages. They understood and they were able to say that if God be for us, who can be against us. They claimed the strength of God, not just Jesus, not just the spirit not just God the creator but all three. In visualizing that their faith grew. They knew the power of evil and sin and they knew that Christ won the victory and they triumphed and they knew that God was for them- God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

St. Patrick’s prayer calling on God for protection and strength and it begins- “I rise today in God’s strength. Provoking the Trinity and believing in the three; confessing to the one and I rise today in the power of Christ’s birth and baptism, in the power of the crucifixion and burial and the power of his rising and the power of ascending and his power of judging.

Is the Trinity important ? I think I know why God planted that seed in me, that I would understand the fullness a little bit more than when I was six, a bit more when I was sixteen and hopefully I will continue to learn until the day I die .The great love that flowed from God the Father, Jesus the son and God the Holy Spirit

Let us pray:

Great God in Heaven, We thank you that we cannot know you fully because if we did, we would not be better for that. We thank you that you teach us that we

can learn, you reveal to us when we are ready and you promised through your Son Jesus to be with us until the end of time. We claim that in our life and in our prayer in our hopes and in our dreams Amen