

**Sermon Preached June 15, 2014
(18th Anniversary of my Ordination to the Deaconate)
Year A, Trinity Sunday
St. John's Episcopal Church
Beverly Farms, Massachusetts
The Rev. Stephanie Chase Bradbury**

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

Today is Trinity Sunday. So there is a story that one day Jesus and his disciples are chatting with each other.

Jesus asks them, "Whom do men say that I am?" And his disciples answer "Some say you are John the Baptist returned from the dead; others say Elijah, or another of the prophets."

And Jesus asks, "But whom do you say that I am?"

Peter answers and says, "Thou art the Logos, existing in the Father as His rationality and then, by an act of His will, being generated, in consideration of the various functions by which God is related to his creation, but only on the fact that Scripture speaks of a Father, and a Son, and a Holy Spirit, each member of the Trinity being coequal with every other member, and each acting inseparably with and interpenetrating every other member, with only an economic subordination within God, but causing no division which would make the substance no longer simple."

And Jesus says, "What?"

You may wonder why we read the very long passage of the first chapter of Genesis and what this may have to do with the Trinity.

But if we listen closely, there is some important information woven through the story which tells us a great deal about God as Trinity. We hear first, of course, of the person of God known as the Father. The one who created. We then hear that “The wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” The word translated “wind” in Hebrew is “ruach,” a word which can also be translated “Spirit.” The Holy Spirit was also present at creation. And finally, we know that the creation happened because God the Father spoke and said, “Let there be light.” That all of God the Father’s creations happened through speech, by the sending out of His Word. His mere Word has creative power and causes the heavens and the earth to form. At the same time in the first chapter of the gospel of John it says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... all things came into being through him... and the Word became flesh and lived among us.” [Jn 1:1, 3, 14]. Jesus is understood to be the “Word” of God, the creative force at the beginning of creation. Through him came light and life. Later he became human.

So the first thing to notice about this reading is that the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are all present at Creation.

The second thing to notice is that the creation is very good. God calls the creation “good” or “very good” seven times in one chapter. This is not a story about original sin. This is a story about Original Blessing. We learn from Genesis that all parts of God the Trinity participated in the creation of a good and blessed universe, both heavens and earth. It was an experience of joy and goodness and connectedness.

There is a quote from Meister Eckhart, the 13th century monk and mystic, who speaks to this point and asks,

“Do you want to know what goes on in the heart of the Trinity?

I will tell you. In the heart of the Trinity the Father laughs and gives birth to the Son. The Son laughs back at the Father and gives birth to the Spirit.

The whole Trinity laughs and gives birth to us.”¹

To know God is to know joy; to comprehend the creation is to laugh, and we and the entirety of the heavens and the earth were created good and loved. Original Blessing.

The third thing to notice in the story of creation is that Humanity is created in the image of God, a God who is three. A God who is in community. A God whose very nature is relationship. The Father relates to the Son relates to the Spirit relates to the Father, and so on. We know that God is love, and we know that love is not solitary.

Love must have an object for love. So God is love within God’s very self, and that trinity of love spills forth into all creation. And we are created in the image of this community of love.

Humanity is created to be connected and in relationship with each other, just like the Trinity. If we truly believe we are made in the image of God, then we will love all other human beings as our brothers and sisters, in the same way that the three persons of the Trinity love. We are social because God is social.

In an article in the Harvard Business Review in 2009, the author writes,

“Within one hour of birth, a human infant will draw her head back to look into the eyes and face of the person gazing at her. Within a few more hours, the infant will orient her head in the direction of her mother’s voice. And, unbelievable as it may seem, it’s only a matter of hours before the infant can actually mimic a caretaker’s expressions. A baby’s mother, in turn,

¹ <http://www.societyofsacredheart.org/spirituality/laughter-and-god?start=1>, 6/14/14.

responds and mimics her child's expressions and emotions within seconds. In short, we're social beings from the get-go: We're born to be engaged and to engage others."²

So three of the things we learn from the story of Genesis: 1) The Trinity is present at creation. 2) The creation is good. And 3) Humanity is made in the image of a God who is relationship within God's very self.

But that goodness and connectedness were broken with the entrance of sin in creation. Humanity was given free will, and with that free will we made choices. And some of the choices we made then, and continue to make today, cause hurt to God and neighbor. Sin is the fracturing of that good creation, that connectedness and relationship, that Original Blessing. Sin is whatever we do which breaks our relationship with the good creation, with each other, and with God.

Americans, I fear, are a particularly isolated people. We have an American image that we pick ourselves up by our bootstraps. That we are self-reliant. That we can be the rugged individual. We can do it alone. We don't want to trouble others, or let them know what is going on in our lives. We are private. At the same time we are removed from the earth. Our food comes prepackaged from a store. We don't have a relationship with the plants or animals that provide it. We seek to live in homes where we can't see our neighbors. We drive cars on highways instead of walk paths where we engage our community. Our lives are so busy we join fewer clubs and organizations. We have fewer friends.

² <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2014/05/27/trinity-sunday-a-2014/>, 6/14/14.

A quote from a recent Atlantic Monthly article says, “In 1950, less than 10 percent of American households contained only one person. By 2010, nearly 27 percent of households had just one person.... According to a major study by a leading scholar of the subject, roughly 20 percent of Americans—about 60 million people—are unhappy with their lives because of loneliness. Across the Western world, physicians and nurses have begun to speak openly of an epidemic of loneliness.... Loneliness and being alone are not the same thing, but both are on the rise. We meet fewer people. We gather less. And when we gather, our bonds are less meaningful and less easy. The decrease in confidants—that is, in quality social connections—has been dramatic over the past 25 years.... Loneliness is at the American core, a by-product of a long-standing national appetite for independence: The Pilgrims who left Europe willingly abandoned the bonds and strictures of a society that could not accept their right to be different. They did not seek out loneliness, but they accepted it as the price of their autonomy. The cowboys who set off to explore a seemingly endless frontier likewise traded away personal ties in favor of pride and self-respect.... The price of self-determination and self-reliance has often been loneliness. But Americans have always been willing to pay that price.”³ But the further we draw from each other, the creation, and God, the further we draw from the laughter and joy of our true identity.

This is why Jesus, the Word, the second person of the Trinity, entered into the creation. He came to help us. To show us right living. Right relationship. To teach us the Way. To take away our sin. To model forgiveness and love. To heal us and the creation. Jesus came to bring us back to Original Blessing. To bring us to the way we were created to be. It was not mistake that he said the greatest commandment was to love God and neighbor. We are meant to be in

³ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/> 6/14/14.

relationship with each other, all creation, and God. We are created to reflect a God whose very self is a loving relationship. There is no loneliness within God!

So now we come to our reading from the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus has died and risen from the dead. He is standing on a mountaintop giving last words to his disciples and he says several things.

First he uses the Trinitarian formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus himself acknowledges that God is Trinity. God is relationship.

Then he commands his followers to make disciples of all nations. For Jesus, making disciples includes two things. 1) Teaching people the Way, the path of love and forgiveness that Jesus taught. When we follow this path we will be in right relationship with creation, neighbor, and God. And 2) Baptize people in the name of this Trinity, a God who is relationship as part of Her very nature. This is not a command to make people a particular religion, but to welcome them into a particular community. A community of people who actively engage in the relationships Jesus taught.

What would our world look like if we were to take that to heart? I already know that most of you do this, simply by being part of this church and being here today. But what would it be to reach out across cultural restrictions and get to know and love our neighbors? To share our deepest and vulnerable selves with many others? To have profound relationships with people we wouldn't think to even talk to? To love the unlovable? To connect with and care for the earth? What about to pray daily and seek a relationship with God? You do all these when you forgive

your dreadful co-worker, plant a tree, offer a meal to someone through Monday Night Supers, and more. In what other ways can we live that would reflect that we are created in the image of a Trinity, a relationship which at its core is love?

Amen.