

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
June 11, 2017
Matthew 28:16-20

A priest asks a young girl, "Sarah, what is the Trinity?" Intimidated, the girl shyly whispers, "The Father, Son and Holy Spirit." "I can't understand you," says the priest. The young girl replies, "You're not supposed to it's a mystery!"

Trinity Sunday is one of those marvellous mysteries of our faith that prevents us from pretending we know what God is all about. It pushes us past our ability to rationalize. It doesn't make sense to our minds.

Before the Age of The Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, people lived more easily with mystery. They didn't feel they had to understand, explain or reduce it. They allowed mystery to breathe life into their world, renewing them in the infinite possibilities that mystery embraces and offers. Back then, science and wonder co-existed easily.

But mystery isn't other-worldly; it is grounded in our experience. In today's reading from Matthew, we hear Jesus say, "Remember I am with you always, to the end of the age." The disciples didn't understand how Jesus would remain with them after his death, but they'd seen enough to trust that what he said *would happen*. How would it happen? They had no way of knowing. But they had been with Jesus long enough to know to keep their eyes, ears and hearts open!

As it turned out, it was the Holy Spirit that came. Completing the Holy Trinity. So this is how the Holy will remain with them, guiding, sustaining and inspiring them.

There are many ways to engage with the Trinity. Through the ages, the Trinity has been described in various ways – a dance, an outpouring, a relationship, a verb/an action rather than a static thing. All these suggestions or interpretations are pointers, hints, enticements.

Whatever image we feel drawn to will give us a taste of the nature of God. God's nature is to love, and love in abundance and without discrimination. We are invited into this exchange of love where the giver and receiver are so close, so intimate, it is difficult to tell the experience of one from the other.

I love the image my teacher, Marshall Rosenberg uses: When you imagine a little child feeding a hungry duck, who is giving? Who is receiving? Who is experiencing more joy? It's the mutuality we see.

My experience is that if our engagement with the Trinity allows love to flow in, through and out of us, we are in right relationship. We know when we are in alignment, when our actions spring from a sense of abundance and well-being. And ease with the situation, even when life is challenging. Even though we may not understand, (and we likely don't!) we trust and have faith.

If our image of the Trinity constricts us and leads us in to judgment, fear and fatigue, the image we are using is not serving. We know this when our actions disconnect us from a sense of well-being

and generosity, and we feel hard and alone. We feel the burden of life on our own shoulders, and we're angry and want to blame others.

Last week I went to a workshop put on by the Diocese called *Dismantling Racism*. At my table sat a man who had lived for several years on the streets of Vancouver's downtown eastside hooked on drugs. He has been clean for a year and a half. As we worked through the two day workshop, I became more and more impressed by this man's wisdom and insight. And the one key learning I took away from him has to do with what it was that helped him turn his life around. It was LOVE. The continued expressions of love he experienced from the people around him. The kind words, the time people took to stop and ask him how he was, the nods that said, "I see and recognize you," the gifts of food, dry socks. And so on. Some people would tell him to pull himself together, others would shame him. But it was love that moved and changed him.

Friday night Jim and I walked to our local pub to have a pint. We were hot from walking and the place was packed. I just couldn't cool down. The server could see I was uncomfortable and commiserated with me. I asked if it would be possible to open the door. "No, but I could put on the air conditioner." But she looked reluctant. "That would be great," I said. "Yes," she answered, "for you. But within a couple of minutes, someone will complain and then I have a problem."

I could see in that instant, the whole problem of our lives. I could have pushed to have her turn on the A/C to suit my needs. And

in pushing my agenda, put the server in a difficult position. Other people's needs would not be met at the expense of mine being met.

I knew that I would cool down in time so I told the woman not to worry. Relieved, she went off to place our order. Minutes later, I saw her speaking to people at a neighbouring table, and from there, she went to the A/C and turned it on. I watched what would happen next. Sure enough, minutes later, she was back at the A/C turning it off.

When we assert our own desires for our own comfort or pleasure, and forget that we are in the service of the larger community, we constrict the flow of love. Sometimes, yes, we need to assert our needs, and we will know when this is so. But so often, we are oblivious to the needs of others and unwittingly and sometimes, knowingly, constrict the experience of others. We forget that we are in the world to serve and show compassion. We forget that life is not about us. We lose sight of the Trinity – the flow of love that holds us all and is more than enough.

When it came time to pay the bill, I acknowledged the awkward position the server had been put in, trying to please everyone. It was impossible. And yet she gallantly tried. We thanked her for her efforts to make everyone comfortable, including us. Our gratitude was a small thing and who knows if it made a difference in her life. But for me it was a reminder that engagement in the flow of love is meant for every situation, every moment. And the more we live in this space, the more we will feel at home in it. Our preferences won't bind us up so much.

I remember the man at the workshop – Love was what moved him. Not someone else’s agenda, not being shamed or blamed, not being pushed or told what to do, but acceptance. The kindnesses that express the accepting, freeing and abundant love of God.

Years ago, I had the insight: Do I want to be right? Or do I want to be in relationship? Of course I still struggle daily with the desire to be right, and to make sure no one can find fault with me. But if I can remember that the drive to be right and to be perfect and to know the right answers has nothing to do with life in God. If I can remember to let God be right, perfect and know all, I can relax and focus on others, instead of on myself.

When I start my sermons, you know I say “In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” It’s interesting to me that I say these words because they really bugged me when I heard priests say them during my early years as a Christian. They sounded so pious. And maybe I do as well. So maybe I should tell you what I’m thinking when I say those words. I’m actually praying, “Please God, may my words serve to bring all of us more fully into the mystery and power of your love.”

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Amen.