

Trinity Sunday Sermon
Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash
May 30, 2021

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”^[a]

Romans 8:12-17

¹² So then, brothers and sisters,^[a] we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba!^[b] Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness^[c] with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Prayer

The Gifts of the Three

Originally from the *Carmina Gadelica I*, 75

Taken from Esther de Waal, editor, *The Celtic Vision* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1988, 2001), p. 163

Spirit, give me of Thine abundance,
Father, give me of Thy wisdom,
Son, give me in my need,
Jesus beneath the shelter of Thy shield.
I lie down tonight,[today]
With the Triune of my strength,
With the Father, with Jesus,
With the Spirit of might. Amen.

Sermon

One of the ancient desert fathers, Evagrius of Pontus (345-399) said:
"God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped he would not be God."¹

For those of you following along with your church bingo card at home, it's Trinity Sunday, a day we sometimes ignore entirely because in thinking of the Trinity we can

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/190-trinity-mystery-and-mercy>

get wrapped up in an intellectual-theological calculus. If we can't get our heads around a certain mathematical formula, we might feel we are slacking off in our duties as trinitarian Christians. In the first centuries, whole church councils were gathered to debate and determine the mechanics of the Trinity. Which member of the trinity proceeded from whom fomented actual battles. In the 19th century the trinitarians (aka congregationalists) split from the unitarians over the three in one nature of God and while wars weren't fought, who got the church silver and who kept the spot on the town green was contentious. In the 20th Century we were at it again: trying to figure out which baptismal formula was sufficiently Trinitarian for one Christian group's baptisms to be recognized by most other Christians. In other words, the Trinity as an intellectual idea is heady, confusing, high stakes, and sometimes contentious. But is that the way we need to approach the Trinity?

When we talked about the Trinity for several weeks this spring in Bible Study, I tried to offer an alternative way of approaching the Trinity as trinitarian Christians: using the Trinity as a way to enter into the great mystery of God in a worshipful way - to find expansive metaphors for prayer and praise - and to relate to God as a relational God. This might lean us toward an Eastern Orthodox approach, if Dan Clendenin has it right: "Western theology tends toward intellectual abstraction. Eastern theology emphasizes adoration of the mystery. It has always been wary of the inadequacies of human language, the limitations of the human mind, and the infinity of God."

The infinity of God.

Augustine said, "If you understood God, it would not be God."

There is no one word or phrase or image that is sufficient to describe God.

Or is there?

The letters of John say that God is love, and that seems like a nearly sufficient word.

If God is love, if God's name is love, if God's mode of being is the action of love, then perhaps what the Trinity gives us is a model for love, for community, for relationality.

We worship one God who is Lover, Beloved, and Love - that's Augustine again - helping us to model how we live upon God who is love, who loves us, who calls us to love. "We are relational beings who are image bearers of a relational God."² Father is not

² James K. A. Smith. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Cultural Liturgies; v. 1. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009, 168-169.

God's name, but the name of a relationship, says womanist Karen Baker Fletcher. What a Trinitarian faith gives us is a way to live that is modeled on holy relationship. The Romans text reminds us that we are loved by God the Father, Abba, Parent - we are connected with Jesus our brother, we are led by the Spirit. This is how we imagine beloved community: A parent who loves a child who is bound together through love, wisdom and inspiration. A trio holding hands with each other, like Kelly Latimore's image on our bulletin today (share screen). A diverse and loving and interconnected and beautiful family that offers itself in love as an open-handed gift to all creation. If we are made in God's image....our diversity must reflect God. If we are made in God's image, our relationality must reflect God, too. In the words of Lexi Boudreaux, the Trinity helps us to "live into God's truth that we are all fundamentally connected to and beholden to one another."³

But really, my great attachment to the Trinity grows from its gift of expansive language. No word, no phrase, no image can possibly describe God. "Reifying metaphors for God risks the sin of idolatry," womanist Karen Baker Fletcher says. Instead expansive language gives us more and more and more words to use in our worship and prayer. The Trinity opens us to expansive language. I think it is a prayer just to speak aloud trios, trinities of expansive God language. God is Father, God is Son, God is Spirit. God is maker, saviour, wisdom. In the words of some of our Bible Study folks, God is Truth, Teacher and Knowledge. God is Faith, Hope, and Love. God is Author, Word, and Reading. God is grace, love and communion. God is for us, Jesus is with us, the Spirit is in us.⁴

At the end of it all I hope engaging the Trinity gives us expansive ways to worship, imaginative ways to pray, loving ways to serve.

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning, our song shall rise to thee.

Let me close with a version of the Lord's Prayer adapted by Maori Christians in New Zealand, for its Trinitarian beauty:

A version of The Lord's Prayer
from The New Zealand Prayer Book

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,

³ In her Ordination Paper for the Metropolitan Boston Association, UCC, 2021

⁴ The Northumbria Celtic community.

Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and testing, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and for ever. Amen.