

Preached by the Rev. Claire Nevin-Field at Emmanuel Church June 4, 2023. Trinity Year A.

Today is the only Sunday in the church year when we celebrate a doctrine rather than a person or event- it is Trinity Sunday. A day preachers dread because the whole thing can seem a bit obscure and dry, so we tend to focus on the mystery, which some see as a theological “punt”, or we desperately try to come up with analogies or explanations that give us a handle on the whole thing. This is a losing battle because any explanation of the subject is going to be woefully inadequate, and probably heretical.

All those cute comparisons you may have heard to explain the whole Father, Son and Holy Spirit relationship: water, ice and steam; sun, light and warmth; the shamrock; and my favorite- a 3 Musketeers bar - each of them wanders some distance down a heretical path.

Any explanation or analogy will be wrong because what we are talking about is God, who is, quite simply, no thing, who is beyond complete human understanding; holy Mystery cannot be reduced to a formula.

The Bible is little help in this matter-the concept of Trinity isn't really overtly addressed anywhere, but what is written often makes it seem like there is some sort of Divine committee of 3 that basically operates independently but occasionally, one presumes, gets together for a conference, or maybe a meal, to discuss how things are going. Perhaps taking a vote on revising

weather patterns or whether or not creating the platypus, which certainly looks like it was created by committee, was a good thing. Did you catch, in the first reading, God saying “let *us* make humankind in *our* image, in our likeness”?

So we could not be blamed for thinking, “Who are all these people and how can they possibly be 3 but 1 and 1 in 3? And what difference does it make”? So we tend to just shy away from the whole subject, giving the Trinity an official shout out once a year, but other than that putting it on the shelf as a vaguely embarrassing and slightly nutty Christian doctrine.

Which is a shame because the Trinity, the Holy Mystery that is 3 in 1 and 1 in 3 is a marvelous thing.

What Trinity tells us is that God is at once the creator or source of all life, is in all life and is larger than- is beyond all life. That the love, the web of relationship within God between Creator, Christ and Spirit- spills over to continually create and sustain this wonderful, awesome world. Further, it tells us that God is the DNA of all there is- as Roman Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson has imagined, this DNA is not a double helix, but the triple helix of life, twisting and turning, a threefold dancing web of relationship that lies within each cell-at the very heart of all life. String theory tells us that subatomic particles- threads that are the building blocks

of all life vibrate- dance- at the heart of all life. And the pattern of their dance is amazingly similar to the pattern the ancient Celts drew as a symbol for the Trinity- what is known as a Celtic or Trinity knot-a 3 lobed knot with no beginning and no end. This dance, seen in the imagination of ancient Celts, is occurring deep within us, part of our essential nature.

Trinity tells us that God is the ground and source of *all* being and is the life from whom all being takes life and exists. That God delights in everything that is and wants to be in relationship with everything that is. That God is, within God's own self, relationship: Holy 3. Eternal, Unending Love flowing from Creator to Word to Spirit and back in an endless circle- a dance of life. You can hear that delight, that joy, that rhythm of dance in the Creation story we just heard from Genesis. The picture we see is of God creating, ordering, and delighting in a Divine dance-a dance in which all creation is a partner.

For me this is where the Trinitarian doctrinal rubber meets the road. If we are in a dance with all of creation, with each part of the dance, each dancer, integral and beloved, critical for the pattern of the dance, then that has startling and sobering implications for how we treat the world and other humans. It certainly means we are to see the Christ, God's own life, in each

person. And more than that, it means we are pushed to look at the whole world differently; if we are in partnership with all that is we can no longer look at the world as one big fat resource, existing only for us humans and what we can get out of it. It means no one creature or species gets to live at the expense of another species-species with whom we are closely related- our kin. Did you know that we share a quarter of our genes with a grain of rice, and 88% with a mouse? If we are in partnership with creation, then God delights in people, yes, but also in ruby throated hummingbirds and spring peepers, in mosquitos and pythons, in gazelles and in platypus, in raspberries, birch trees and poison ivy, in ticks and in jellyfish-all whirling on this blue and green globe of a dance floor. It means we need to let go of the idea that just because something doesn't have apparent value for us, it is worthless. Let go of the idea that things that we aren't constantly manipulating, land we aren't plowing or planting or extracting something from or building on is going to waste. As if anything in this dance of life, anything that has the Divine dancer deep within its being is superfluous.

Let go of the idea that we can ignore this intricate relationship and not be wounded by our own actions- wounds sustained not just by us but by all of creation, because what affects one partner in the dance, affects all of the dancers-and right now we humans are pretty poisonous dance partners.

Now, more than ever, those of us who hold this theology need to speak, to dance, to live differently. In an era when governments worldwide are hesitant to address the crisis, and backing out of international agreements to address human caused global climate disruption, where laws put in place to protect the air, water, food, the land itself from toxins and pollutants have been rolled back, those of us who believe that Creation is God's, not ours, who believe that God lives in all life, we need to live as if we believe it. We need to be agents of earth-justice. A good friend of mine was prone to asking me (at the most annoying moments): "Claire, if you were on trial for being a Christian and you could not speak in your own defense, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" That always brings me up short. And the question I have been asking myself lately, the question I am asking us today is, if we say we believe the earth is the Lord's, is there enough evidence of that to convict us?

This doesn't mean we can live without any sort of a footprint- even hermits living in caves or people who are living completely off the grid leave a footprint-that is what happens when you dance. We will alter the earth by our presence-every blessed thing that ever lived has done so. But if we are indeed just one dancer in God's eternal dance, we need to be thoughtful about our relationship to the world, we need to think of what kind of

footprint we will leave- we need to tread lightly, carefully and thoughtfully-we need to think about what we eat, what we throw away. We need to remember that we are partners in the world, not Lords or even stewards; Beloved yes and integral to the dance but sharing the dance with a host of other Beloveds-with this amazing, beautiful, breathtaking world and all the myriad creatures twirling on it- each a reflection, an expression, of God's own self and the One who invites us into the holy dance of life. This is the great Mystery of Trinity in Unity. And calling it Mystery is not, in the end, a theological "punt", but is an acknowledgment of the awesome nature of God. That all of life, from our own atoms to the most distant galaxy, everything that has been is, or is to come, is held in God's own life and is a partner in the dance. That the God who breathed all that is into existence, preached, loved, healed, and died on a cross in Jerusalem 2000 years ago also dances deep within our bones and that this dance of life will go on forever. That is holy mystery, merciful and mighty. God for us and in us and with us. World without end. Amen.