
God is a "We"

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The Very Reverend Harry Pritchett

Trinity Sunday

Today is Trinity Sunday, and yet, this homily begins with a confession. I really never much liked Trinity Sunday. It's always seemed difficult to preach on this Sunday. I usually ended up with a sort of a lecture "" a theology class on the Trinity""three in one, one in three, and what most folks would ask was, " well, so what?" And frankly I would join that chorus of inquirers myself. Why is the Trinity such an important doctrine that it gets its feast day in the Church calendar? After all, we usually celebrate an event""the birth, death, resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, or some exemplary saint or even all the saints. But on Trinity Sunday we hold up a theological proposition, not something God has done for us in some great dramatic act, nor some saintly person who has lived his or her life with faithfulness, but rather a picture - a description of a fundamental aspect of who God is""three in one and one in three, ""Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Now truthfully, that seems pretty esoteric and remote from the struggles and joys and decisions and disappointments of my life, and maybe yours as well. Trinity Sunday is the only feast day that we have which is not a story. The Trinity is a doctrine and not a story per se. And I must admit that one of the prime things I like about the Anglican tradition is that we don't spend all our time talking about doctrines.. We don't get into predestination and we don't have some universal doctrine of the atonement or clear doctrine of the resurrection. We usually only hold up and proclaim the stories.

History tells us folks have burned each other at the stake and chopped off each others heads over doctrines. Christians have murdered each other about words in the Holy Communion with God's name on their lips. We have literally fought wars over who speaks with authority about this doctrine or that doctrine. I heard this morning driving to the Cathedral that today was the 400th anniversary of the day that Christians burned Joan of Arc at the stake!

I sometimes cringe when I remember long, convoluted, self righteous arguments I would spew forth trying to enlighten some unfortunate fool about the true inner working of God. I don't know about you, but I hide when the doorbell rings and I think it's some nice looking young men wanting to explain God to me. I think with my arrogant old brain that there's something down-right presumptuous about lots of god talk. When I talk about God, I tend to reduce. I tend to create God in my own image rather than the other way round. My hunch is that we Episcopalians, at least on our good days, have the grace not to presume to be able to read the mind of God. The strength of the Anglican spirit is that we, at least usually, don't point at each other and say you are in and you are out depending on whether you read the Bible this way or that, or believe this theory or that doctrine. One of my old friends, an old line Atlantan, long ago departed this life, said to me one time at All Saints, " You know, Harry, the trouble with the Episcopal Church is we will just take anybody!" To which I replied, "Well, friend, that may be the glory of the Episcopal church as well!" He reluctantly agreed. Now of course we might think each other is wrong, or crazy, but not out. We don't throw each other out, that is usually. And there's a big difference.

So why do we have this doctrinal Trinity Sunday in our church? And what in heaven or earth does the Trinity have to do with our stories or the stories of the people we know? And of course, I don't know for sure. I don't know the answer. Not one of us has all the answers, not to the big questions or the little ones, and for sure not to the mystery at the center of the Universe.

But I think we do know, in fact all of us knows down deep that what we celebrate on this Trinity Day and all the days we gather together, is that we were not created to be alone... to be by our selves.... From the beginning God said to us, "It is not good to be alone."

We were not created to face life alone. We were not created to face death alone. My former colleague at All Saints' parish, Martha Sterne, (to whom I am indebted for much of this sermon), put it this way, "What we remember on Trinity Sunday is that in the very heart of God, there is a "we", and "we", more than I or you, "we" are made in the image of God." Which of course is to say, as Martha reminds me, that the whole universe is eternally related, always in relationship with every thing else that is. In some ways God and we are one, and in other ways God and we are many. All an eternal mystery.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he looked at the people he had transformed into a "we" and he said the very presence of God is here among us and around us and mainly between us, "when two or three are gathered together, I am in the midst of you," which is to say, I am between you, as well as in and around you, BETWEEN us. Jesus promised that to us.

Once when I was Dean of the Cathedral in New York I learned that again in a profound way. It was my first St. Francis Day and Blessing of the Animals. Now, this is a mammoth production! Two or three hundred young singers from all over the country, three dance companies from the Cathedral, costumes, flags, drums, orchestra, and of course, the exhilarating music of Paul Winters' *Earth Mass*, which incorporates the sounds of whales and wolves and dogs and monkeys and the earth shattering roar of a lion at the end of the Sanctus. It's as if the whole creation is saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy." It's an incredible liturgy with literally hundreds of volunteers to make it happen. The flowers alone - particularly the sunflowers, simply light up the place. Well, lots of planning, lots of *show biz*, lots of ecclesiastical glitz! That year, lots of added headaches with secret service folks everywhere because Vice President Al Gore was preaching. Frankly as the Eucharist was ending - 3000 or more having taken communion, accompanied by their dogs and cats and goldfish and snakes - I was glad it was almost over; I could breathe easily again. However, the procession of the animals for the blessings comes last. There is a hallowed silence - amazingly even the dogs are quiet - as the great Cathedral brass doors are opened slowly and the rays of the October sunlight come bounding in. And there, silhouetted against the luminous sun, stood the elephant to lead the procession. I know it sounds rather spectacularly tacky - just too cute and too much! But I want to tell you, I caught my breath in surprise. Tears filled my eyes - stunning! The procession began. All the leaders, hundreds of them in red cassocks, flowers draped on all the animals, slowly moved down the 200 yards of the nave toward the altar in total silence. Eagles, two white stallions, camels, llama, spiders and lizards, snakes and cows and chickens, and pigs and ponies - and every kind of bird in the universe.. And bees and earth worms - and even a jar of algae, and that year even rock from the moon.. all of these and all us humans of every color, age, background and social standing. Movie stars and bishops and old time New Yorkers and folks from the shelter - all gathered around the table, the holy table of the heart of the Universe - and the truth was laid bare. We really are one, many, for sure, but mysteriously one through the Holy Triune Creator - the God who is a "we". We are not alone, God is not alone! God's whole creation is really one large community and everything is related to everything else.

So, my sisters, and brothers in Christ, as my friend Martha Sterne proclaimed to me years ago, I still believe God has called us to be a community where everything and everybody can stop behaving as though we are alone. I believe God has called us to be a community where people who may have little in common can practice saying "WE". And thinking, "WE" and doing "WE". And becoming "WE". In the bread and the wine and the prayers and the missions where people can practice being a "WE" that deepens and broadens and reaches out and includes all the creation,. Where "we" can practice following the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom who says "WE". And teaches us to say "WE""as in ""we' believe", as in ""our' Father" because ultimately, "WE" are not alone,

By the grace and in the name of God... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen