The Dance of the Trinity

A sermon by Clayton Harrington, *seminarian*
Trinity Sunday – Year C

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

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

I love watching people dance. As for myself, I'm not gifted with the innate ability to dance, nor have I ever taken dance lessons in order to gain that ability. But I've always enjoyed watching other people dance. From professional ballroom dancing to the carefully choreographed dances of the latest Broadway musical, every style of dance has something that captures my attention and draws me in.

The way that the dancers come together and move to the rhythm and beat of the music is fascinating; every move that they make together is like the stroke of a paintbrush by a trained artist. The Bible itself is full of people dancing to express joy and confidence in the Lord. It is part of our human nature to dance, even if it's when no one is looking or after we've had that second glass of wine. Dancing has a way of bringing people together, as those who join the dance must move together as one, in order for the dance to continue. I think that watching people dance can actually help us understand this somewhat tricky concept of the Trinity.

Throughout history, the Church has used words like coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial, to explain the Christian belief that God is "one God in three persons" – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Needless to say, the doctrine of the Trinity has confused and confounded people throughout the centuries. To say "One plus One plus One equals One" goes against our rational and mathematical minds.

I have no intention of attempting a complete and full explanation and defense of the Trinity. However, on this Trinity Sunday, I would like to offer one word that may help us to better understand the Trinity and how it might actually apply to us as a community. That word is "perichoresis" [Pe-ri-cho-reysis].

Perichoresis is a Greek word that comes from the prefix "peri" meaning "around," and "choreo" meaning "contain." As such this word is often translated as "rotation." Theologians used the term "perichoresis" in regards to the Trinity to provide an image for the concept, rather than a rhetorical formula or analogy. In this understanding, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit not only embrace one another, but they also permeate, contain, and exist in one another.

I think it is no coincidence, that by changing one letter in perichoresis, the word changes to mean "dance around." Picture a circle dance in which members join hands and slowly begin to spin about the room, each maintaining their own identity, but becoming inseparably part of the dance that is taking place. The Triune God is an eternal circle dance of the Father, Son, and Spirit. In this dance, the three divine persons of the One God have loved one another and been in relationship with one another for all eternity. Through this never-ending dance, "the divine persons exist so intimately with one another, for one another, and in one another, that they constitute a single, unique, and complete unity by themselves."[1]

So, why is the Trinity important and why have we set aside a whole day to talk about this concept? What does it all matter? C.S. Lewis says, "It matters more than anything else in the world. The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his [or her] place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made."[2]

So, how do we join this eternal dance? Paul says in today's epistle, that it is "through Jesus Christ, [that] we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." So we see, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in God becoming human, God invites us into the dance.

By taking on our humanity, God invites us to join in the dance of divinity. And we come into this dance, just as God participates in the dance—as community—with others that are seated here today all around us and "with Christians across time and across the world." We cannot dance on our own, but we dance with one another, in Koinonia, the blessed community. In this dance of fellowship and love, we do not give up our own identities or personalities, but come together in common unity to further God's Kingdom on earth. Every week we affirm our many-ness and our oneness when we send forth Eucharistic visitors saying, "We who are many are one body, because we are one in Jesus Christ."

Our dance together in God, our community as the Body of Christ will allow us to do things together that we could never imagine on our own. Jesus gave us the great mission of our Christian community— to "make disciples of all nations" and to invite others into the great dance by "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In this dance we will learn to love God and to love one another, and together we can make a difference in this world.

Of course, we will occasionally step on someone else's foot or step out of line in the dance. But the beauty of the dance is that God is in control and always invites us back. Allowing the love of God to bind us together, just as it binds the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together, will bring more joy and fullness to lives and our ministries than anything else. All we have to do is accept the invitation of the Triune God and step out onto the dance floor.

Jesus sings to us in the words of the English songwriter Sydney Carter: "I danced in the morning when the world was begun. I danced in the moon, and the stars, and the sun. And I came down from heaven and I danced on the Earth. At Bethlehem I had my birth. Dance, then, wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the Dance said he. And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be. And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he."[3] Amen.

[1] Jürgen Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," https://oimts.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/06_1997_moltmann.pdf, accessed 15 May 2016.

[2] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity,* in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics,* (NY: HarperOne, 2002), 95.

[3] Sydney Carter, "I Danced in the Morning," Stainer & Bell, Ltd., London, England. (Admin. by Hope Publishing Co.), 1963.

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