

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson
Trinity Sunday Year A
June 15, 2014

Last week we had the incredible joy of drawing into our parish family two beautiful babies: Olivia and George. It is my hope of course, that before too long, we will be planning their baptisms, and we will say the words Jesus instructs us to today, as we pour water on their foreheads and Betsy or I say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." All baptisms are miraculous events, for it is a moment of joining heaven and earth; when we choose and bind ourselves to God, and God to us in a brand new way, and we are formed into a holy union, the bonds of which can never be broken.

Our gospel story today was clearly chosen for Trinity Sunday because of the Trinitarian language used in Jesus' instruction about baptism. Although not discounting this evidence of Trinitarian language in today's gospel or even in the letter from Paul, it may be helpful to remember that at the time of Jesus and immediately following his death, there was not a formed doctrine of the trinity. You can imagine the struggle it must have been for those who knew Jesus, who knew he was more than a prophet, more than a role model, but somehow their comprehension that skin was placed upon God and God appeared among them, was a lot to reconcile with their commitment to have only one God. We can see why it took a long time and involved many arguments to come forward with an integrated theology that included the 3 persons of God.

Even in our story, as Jesus gathers the disciples in Galilee, where he was known to have done his teaching, and he commissions them as disciples, there were still those who had doubt. The formulation of the doctrine of the trinity in the 3rd and 4th centuries, which resulted in our creeds was messy, and that's okay for whenever we are trying to define God or find adequate words to express God, it's never neat and clean. I think it's intended that way. As our story from Genesis reminds us today, God created out of chaos, and if at times our concept of God feels a bit unsettled or mysterious, or out of our grasp, or if we feel compelled to embrace another way of life, which at first seems foreign to us because of the transforming nature of being in relationship with God through Christ, then I imagine we're on the right track. Being in relationship with God and balancing that, or finding a harmony with, your set of beliefs about God can be a bit messy. It usually is.

For some of us, we love the intellectual adventure of exploring the doctrine of the Trinity. We want to delve into all the heresies uncovered; we want to get our heads around the 3 persons of the trinity and what their relationship really is. Is it a hierarchical relationship, with God the Father at the top? Or is there co-equality and a unity based on diversity and complexity? There surely is a lot to think about there.

For some of us, it's a spiritual exercise of exploring the concept of the trinity. You may yearn for a specific and unique relationship with each of the persons of the trinity, truly differentiating among them, and know how to identify and articulate your relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There was a friend of mine in Port Washington who was very concerned that she never prayed to Jesus and she yearned for a deeper connection to her Lord, because she knew her overall relationship with God would be more meaningful to her and more transformational to her life, if she grasped what Jesus could offer her.

And for some of us, the doctrine of the trinity truly matters nothing. We mumble our way through the creed because we can't honestly say we believe each line and we wonder if that makes us an inauthentic Christian. The creeds appear to have no relationship to our love of God, our practice of listening to God, our openness of our heart to the teachings of Christ, our commitment to be a disciple of Christ, and we stick with what we know intimately: our relationship with God, and we mumble our way through the creeds.

And I think particularly, when we find ourselves in difficult spots, when we feel beaten down by life's realities, when we struggle to just make it, or put one foot in front of the other, or when we yearn to see a vision of something greater than what we regularly see in life, when chaos swarms around us, it is appropriate that we only know that God loves us, that God forgives us, and God is ushering us into a redeemed life. These are not times to pull the trinity apart. These are times to be drawn into the entire being of God in a relationship we cannot comprehend, but one that we can celebrate.

Last week I spoke to you about one of God's languages I learned through my work this past year with Women In Need: compassion. This week I want to briefly tell you of another language I learned of God this past year: unity, because through this language I was more able to comprehend the trinity.

The unity we speak about among the persons in the trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), is the same unity we pattern our relationships in our church around, and is the same unity we are called to as a body of Christ, and is the same unity we experience in the Eucharist.

This unity was revealed to me, by being so immersed in God's creation. I learned the language of unity through diversity and complexity and interdependence but sitting on my back patio, allowing myself to be formed by the primary revelation of God: God's creation. Now I can tell you how each of the "persons" of the Trinity showed up over the past year in my visual and spiritual landscape. In a summer storm last year, when I saw these 100' tall trees sway and bend in the strong wind, that made me comprehend more fully the God beyond us, often referred to as God the Father. The long awaiting greening of the forest floor this spring of course spoke to me of

God the Son, the one who continually creates within us renewed life. And as I deeply grieved my mother's death last year and I yearned to sit in the woods, and I felt the wind encircle me, and the birds which showed up and "abided" with me, and the awareness that God holds all things, sunrises and sunsets, beginnings and endings, and joy and sorrow all together in this marvelous thing we call creation, allowed the pain of loss to be pulled from my heart and soul. For me that was the work of the Holy Spirit, the God among us.

It was easy for me to see these distinct parts, but what I was called to see was not the parts, but the unity, how all of this was put together, with diversity and complexity, with intentionality and purpose, with care and for the purpose of healing. This to me is what the triune God represents.

Of course, one of my fascinations of living in the woods is watching the deer feed on our property. I always feel privileged that they come so close to the house to eat. And in the fall I saw something that totally amazed me. The fur of the deer changed color. It goes from the reddish brown color of summer to a darker gray, to blend in with the bark of the trees, which change color due to the angle and the lack of directness of the sun. We and all of creation are connected together in a unity that is beyond our comprehension.

My experience of God this past year, the language I discovered in creation, reinforces for me my doctrine of the trinity, and yet, solidifies my belief that it is my ongoing and ever deepening and always mysterious relationship with God that matters. It's wonderful when our belief and our experience of God match up. For me, it did in a profound way this past year. And yet, I know it's not done. For we are always called to explore this unity God calls us into more deeply, and in more faithful ways.

To do this, we need to be obedient to Jesus. That's what brought the disciples into this remarkable story this morning, when they were commissioned to go out into the world, making disciples across all nations, so there could be unity among humankind, which in turn would restore us to unity with God.

The disciples did as Mary had told them the morning she discovered the empty tomb. They went to Galilee. They did what Jesus had asked them to do, prior to his death. They did what he asked, even if they each or some or all harbored doubt in their hearts. They trusted Jesus enough to give it a try as a way to take on the resurrected life of Christ.

We too have been instructed by Jesus to do a number of things. We have been instructed to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which we joyfully do. We do this because Jesus told us to do it and we trust that by doing so, we will be drawn into a unity of God beyond our comprehension, and we're willing to give it a try.

We too have been instructed to bless bread and wine and to eat and drink together in remembrance of Jesus. It is through this act, this sacrament, which we get a glimpse of the unity into which we are all drawn. This is where we will find our unity. As Bishop Curry, who preached at Bishop Baxter's Celebration spoke about in the New Tracts for our Time YouTube on the Eucharist,

This is the sacrament of unity that can overcome the deepest estrangements between human beings. The Eucharist has been moved into the center of our worship and perhaps also into the center of your life.

The Eucharist sums up and points toward the deep mystery of God. There are no words adequate for this. In the Eucharistic moment, when simple bread and wine, are taken, blessed, broken and given. All we know is that Jesus shows up.

It's a mystery, it's strange.

It's God.

Jesus asked us to do this in remembrance of him. And we do this to show forth Jesus' death and life and what Jesus means in this world.

This is the invitation Jesus gives us. To come, to know the triune God, who mysteriously shows up to offer us renewed life. We are immersed into the whole being of God, whether we understand it or not.

When I baptize Olivia, or George, or anyone else, I want to be able to baptize that person in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For were I not to baptize in the name of the Father, I would so miss offering to this beautiful little person the sense of awe of our creator God, who ruled over the chaos and offered us life. Were I not to be able to baptize in the name of Jesus, I would so miss sharing with her or him the joy that God has set within each ending a new beginning. And were I not to be able to baptize in the name of the Holy Spirit, I would feel distraught that I could never instill in that person the sense of a God who actively pursues them, guides them, and ushers them into the truth. Even though we can never comprehend nor express adequately the triune God, somehow, I think we know that that God exists ~ and there within lies our salvation.

Amen.