

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
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Trinity Sunday Year A
June 11, 2017

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

Good morning! It's Trinity Sunday, which, besides being a celebration of the unity of the three persons of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is also the transition in the church year from the extremes of penitence and festival that end with the Easter season into what we now call Ordinary Time—how we live our regular day-to-day lives. Pentecost last week wrapped up the Easter season, a happy ending, because it reminds us that during our ordinary lives, God is with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. So Trinity Sunday is supposed to help us understand—after the big celebrations of the life of Jesus and his saving work on the Cross, the work of God the Father in raising Jesus from the dead, and the dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—Trinity Sunday is supposed to help us understand how all that helps us live our ordinary lives in this long season after Pentecost. Hm, well. Good luck with the understanding part. Because the theological concept of the Trinity took several hundred years to hammer out—blood was shed and schisms resulted from the disagreements. We're left with mystery—how the Three is One and the One is Three, and God the Three in One is co-eternal, uncreated, incomprehensible. We did get a creed out of it. It's all there on pages 864 and 865 in the Book of Common Prayer for your reading enjoyment.

But here's the paradox of all this—that it's mysterious actually makes sense! How can we the finite creatures possibly hope to understand the infinite Creator? Well, through struggle, through the drafting of creeds, which do little to define God, but mainly serve to define our experience of God. And what our tradition realized was the most common experience of God was that sometimes we understand God as Father Creator, sometimes we understand God as Son Redeemer, and sometimes we understand God as Spirit Sustainer. But we also understand that these aren't three separate gods, but together One God, in community with God's own self, providing a model for what our community can and should be.

So it's good to dip our toes into the mystery, but let's not get too crazy with that—even if your eyes aren't glazing over yet, maybe the glaze is starting to creep into our minds—or maybe you're fine, and that's my own limitation on how much mystery I can take in one sitting. In any case, let's take what's in front of us from the readings we heard, focusing on the Gospel, but bringing in the others as time and connections allow.

I want to start out with the second sentence of the Gospel reading, because it links us to our culture's problem with mystery and how we mistakenly think that if we can't tolerate mystery very well, then maybe we aren't allowed to call ourselves people of faith. Here's some good news—doubt is allowed. The Gospel says: "When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted." Remember, this is the cream of the crop, these are the guys who have been with Jesus from the beginning, who heard all the teaching, saw all the miracles, were even given the power and ability to do miracles themselves, and then watched him die on the cross, so they knew that the resurrection

wasn't some smoke and mirrors trick or some last minute switcheroo. What on earth could they be doubting? It's not clear exactly, but I don't think that's the point. I think the point is, God probably expects our doubts, and they don't get in the way of God's work and the work we do with God, bringing God's kingdom on earth, seeing Christ in each other and being Christ to each other. It may not feel too comfortable to doubt, but it doesn't separate us from God.

Ok, let's go back to the first sentence now, which starts out, "The eleven disciples went to Galilee..." Did anyone else experience a slight jarring when you heard that "eleven"? I mean, I think it's obvious that it's Judas who's missing, since he betrayed Jesus and had hung himself in the chapter before, but still, we're used to hearing about the twelve, the twelve, the twelve. It's one of those recurrent numbers in the Bible, for one thing, and as far as I can see, the only other time the number eleven is mentioned is in the book of Acts when the remaining apostles are voting on Judas's replacement. I wonder what could have happened if Judas had managed to endure his despair and come to the realization that God's grace was sufficient even for him, that the consequences of his doubt didn't prevent God's work from being done—in fact, his doubt and resultant actions were necessary for God's work getting done. Maybe Judas would have been restored to fellowship and Matthias, his replacement, would have discovered another calling. I don't think this is heresy. Any one of us can be assigned the role of Judas in the Palm Sunday reading of the Passion Gospel, and that symbolism reveals that every one of us is culpable in the betrayal of Jesus at one point or another in our lives. We are no better or worse than Judas, and yet we know that Jesus' saving grace is

extended to us. So there's no reason it couldn't be extended to Judas as well.

And this leads me to consider the places in the other readings today that point to our need for reconciliation with God and with others—in the creation story, maybe that comes through in the continued presence of darkness, even though the good creation of light counters it; in the Psalm there's the mention of enemies and adversaries of God's sovereignty; and in the Epistle reading we get the closing remarks of Paul whose whole letter was about dealing with bitter, bitter conflict and strife within the Corinthian church and against Paul specifically. So look at that trajectory—from the very beginning of a good creation through the Gospels, into the life of the early church, there is brokenness. Perhaps another set of readings will offer a more convenient discussion about the reasons that a good God allows such brokenness, even evil, in this world—that's beyond what I'm prepared to do with today's readings. But the response to brokenness, the hope and promise of healing and reconciliation is found in God, specifically in God as the Trinity as revealed in today's readings.

So, where am I getting that, how can I make that claim? Let's shift our attention briefly to the Epistle. Look at what Paul is calling the Corinthians to do: "Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace...Greet one another with a holy kiss." Imagine someone you have been in conflict with or are still in conflict with. In the thick of it, don't these things that Paul is telling them to do seem impossible? And on top of that, in spite of an incredible threat to Paul's authority, everything in his language indicates that he still considers himself a part of the community, but not by using language of oppression and force, asserting his rightful authority. Instead, he calls

them “brothers and sisters”, he blesses them with “the God of love and peace will be with you”, and he affirms that the greater church is still in fellowship with this rebellious congregation with his words “All the saints greet you.” Are you kidding me? How does this guy who, granted, is no longer assenting to the death of saints, yet he still brings that forcefulness and fractiousness to this and other letters, how does this prickly guy let go of that and call the Corinthians to a better way? The answer is in the next line, the power and hope of the gifts of the Trinity: “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.” The grace, love, and communion of God the Trinity. That’s where our hope and power for healing of brokenness comes from, even in the most hopeless of situations. The only way the Corinthians can achieve the reconciliation described in the first paragraph of the Epistle is by drawing on the gifts of the Trinity as outlined in the second paragraph.

So let’s finish up with the Gospel reading, because the rest of it also has to do with the qualities of the Trinity. Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” and I think, well, yeah, how else could his resurrected self be standing in front of them if he didn’t have the power of that authority? But then he charges the disciples to spread the good news in a way that echoes the charge of God in the creation story to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth. So this authority is not only shared amongst the persons of the Trinity, the Trinity shares it with us! That’s audacious. We messed it up the first go around, and now we’re getting another chance to mess it up? Well, yes and no. The difference is that now the person of Jesus has come into our picture, and so the power and hope of redemption when things get messed up is what’s different. Because we

have and we will mess it up again. Certainly, it already started in the early church as evidenced by Paul's letters to the Corinthians, and we can all probably think of more recent examples of ways we have gotten sidetracked from following God. But just as Paul chose to end his letter by appealing to the strength of love, and even more so, just as the most powerful act of God was accomplished through the powerlessness of the Cross, so all that we are called to do to "make disciples of all nations" is let people know that they belong to God, under the protection of God's name, being formed as disciples by resisting evil and obeying the teachings.

I'll end by returning to where we started—talking about the church year. I like how this Season after Pentecost roughly corresponds to the growing season in our northern hemisphere. And being in this rural community, it's easy to witness just how difficult it is to grow things. Several years I've noticed that farmers have had difficulty getting crops in because of too much rain in the early part of the season, only to be faced with the loss of that same crop later because of drought late in the season. I've thought also of the force, drive, and energy it takes for a tiny seed to shoot up a tiny tendril that manages to plow through several inches of dirt just to make it to the surface, let alone survive gnawing critters in order to reach maturity. And that's what this Season after Pentecost is about: the struggle, hope, and faith it takes to grow. Let's continue to grow together this season, encouraging each other to be Christ to and see Christ in each other and in our neighbors—that's all we need to do to make disciples because being Christ and seeing Christ is one way that Jesus is with us "always, to the end of the age". Amen.