

## TRINITY SUNDAY

June 7, 2020

UMCG

It's a known fact that many Pastors avoid preaching on Trinity Sunday because they find the topic so daunting. Not a few have passed the buck and delegated preaching on this Sunday to their Associate or some hapless seminarian. One joke has it that when Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do others say that I am?" the disciples answered: "Some say that you are John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others say that you are Elijah, or one of the other prophets." Then Peter launched into a full blown discourse on Jesus as the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made.....Upon hearing this, Jesus, half-stunned, simply said, "What?"

Certainly, there are biblical texts that hint at, even point toward, the notion of God as a plurality. Our reading today from Genesis 1 is often cited in this regard as in verses 1 and 2 there seems to be a distinction between the creating God who made heaven and earth, and the Spirit hovering over the waters. Verses 26-28 go on to refer to God creating humans "in our image (plural)." In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the baptism of Jesus hints at the notion of a Trinity when a voice from the heavens loudly affirms Jesus as the beloved Son upon whom the Spirit alights in the form of a dove. Clearer still in the Synoptic Gospels is today's reading where the Risen Christ commissions his disciples to "go into all the world, preaching the Gospel, teaching all that I have commanded, and baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." In other words, this Trinitarian baptismal formula appeared in the mid-80's to 90's of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E., 50 – 60 years after Jesus's death and resurrection. Then John's Gospel, written around 100 CE, presents Jesus in Greek philosophical terms as the Logos, the Word, the pre-existent ordering principle of the universe who is co-creator with God.

In recent decades, modern theologians have underscored the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, one theologian, Stanley Grenz, has written a compelling Systematic Theology based on the Trinity. His book is titled *Theology for the Community of God*. Dr. Grenz writes: "God's essence is love...God is love refers first to the intra-trinitarian relationship. God is love within God's self: The Father loves the Son; the Son reciprocates that love; and this love between Father and Son is the Holy Spirit. God is the social Trinity, the community of love." (1)

Dr. Grenz goes on to explain how both creation and salvation are external outpourings of God's love. In short, God as a loving community of persons in relationship is the basis and model for all personal relationships, all loving relationships, all loving and just communities, of which the church is but one example.

John's Gospel perhaps most clearly communicates this as Jesus speaks of the intimate relationship he has with the Father. Jesus and the Father are one. If you've seen Jesus, you've seen God. If you know Jesus, you have a personal relationship with Jesus, and are immediately drawn into this dynamic of love. In my sermon from John 14 several weeks ago, I spoke of the Paraclete, the Spirit of Love that Jesus sent his disciples upon his departure. The same Spirit sent to us, that we might love God, that we might love one another, that we might love all God's children and all God's good creation.

Two weeks ago, the Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullit-Jonas, an Episcopalian Priest serving in Lincoln, MA, also preached from John 14, Jesus's farewell discourse. (2) What immediately grabbed her attention was the very first sentence: "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Pastor Margaret asks: "How do we make sense of those words – how do those words resonate within us – in a time of such enormous uncertainty, loss, and fear? Here we are, in the midst of a global pandemic. Our lives have suddenly turned upside down and we are acutely aware of our vulnerability to suffering and death. People we know and love may be sick or may have died. Businesses have closed, the economy is teetering, and not far behind, coming on fast, we know that an even larger crisis is bearing down upon us - the climate and ecological crisis. Week by week the news from climate science seems to get more dire. This precious blue-green planet is reeling – and we reel with it as we face the threat of social and ecological collapse."

Talk about reeling! Pastor Margaret preached her sermon prior to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Prior to the massive outrage and upheaval we as a nation have experienced in the wake of continued racism, in the wake of yet another act of police brutality in the killing of a black man, in public, in broad daylight. What in the world could Jesus mean by telling his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled?" Was he living in denial of suffering and death? Was he minimizing...was he suppressing...painful feelings and cold hard facts? No! Why? Because, as Pastor Margaret points out, "Jesus was rooted in the love of God. Because he knew nothing could separate him – or us – from that love.

Because he knew that through the power of his Spirit, we would be drawn, as he was drawn, into the divine life that circulates at the center of everything and that can never be destroyed.”

As followers of Jesus, what are we to do? The answer is love. And love expresses itself by caring. By caring for and loving what God loves. In Genesis 1 & 2, God asks us to love God’s good creation by caring for it – keeping it, protecting it – not polluting or exploiting it. And in Matthew 28, Jesus asks us to love the world...to love our neighbors. How? By sharing, by demonstrating the Good News of God’s love for all. By respecting, honoring and treating all persons for who they are: God’s beloved children made in God’s image. Amen.

Rev. Rich Darr – Pastor, UMC of Geneva, IL

- (1) Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, Chapter 2 - The Triune God.
- (2) Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, Sermon: “Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled: Searching for steadiness in a precarious time,” St. Anne’s-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church,” Lincoln MA, May 10, 2020.