

Trinity

Today is Trinity Sunday, a day on which I love to preach. I've rarely encountered anyone else who does. Clergy complain about writing sermons for a Sunday that honors a doctrine. And after all of the excitement of Pentecost, isn't Trinity Sunday a letdown?

Well, it's true that last week *was* exciting. In addition to the Holy Spirit's rushing wind and tongues of fire on Pentecost, we celebrated the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. It was a grand day. Nonetheless, today *is* the feast day of Trinity Cathedral. So once again this morning we have the Quad City Brass, and both the Cathedral Choir and Bell Choir will bring us music before taking the summer off. It's still a banner day.

Trinity Sunday is also the one day each year when we *intentionally* think about who God is and who we imagine God to be. Some think of God as a stern judge waiting for people to trip up so they can be punished. For some, God is a distant figure that has no interest in them or the world. For others, God is a buddy who walks with me and talks with me and tells me that I'm his own. Or maybe God is pure energy, a living spark, the life force. Who is God, really?

My favorite answer to that question comes from the fourth-century bishop Gregory of Nazianzus, who had a simple answer: we can't really know. It's rather like looking at the sun, Gregory said. You can't. On the other hand, we can experience the light and heat that come from the sun. Just because we can't look directly at the sun doesn't mean that it's not there. The same is true of God.

Gregory spoke of God as an eternal relationship of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that through the Incarnation, the eternal God became a human being, walking on earth. Jesus Christ not only revealed who God is to the extent that we can know that; Jesus also showed us what it means to be fully human and reconciled us to God and to one another.

That's the point of the passage from Romans that we heard this morning. Through Jesus Christ we have peace with God and the hope of sharing the glory of God. Paul gives a wonderful progression of how to live. From suffering we learn endurance; from endurance, character; and from character, hope. Hope does not disappoint us, Paul says, because of the love of God.

That love is poured into our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit, the third "Person" of the Trinity. Last week we experienced the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Now that all three Persons have been revealed, today we can celebrate the Trinity.

Thinking of God as an eternal relationship is key to our faith. Made in the image of God, we are hard-wired for relationship with one another. A *private* Christian faith makes no sense. We need each other to be fully human, to expand our understanding of God, to experience the love of God, and to be accountable to one another in leading a Christ-like life. That's what church should be about, extending the love of God to one another and to the world. That's why we come together each week as a community of faith.

That's also why I like preaching on Trinity Sunday. There's nothing dry about proclaiming God's love. It is life-giving and life-affirming, exactly what the world needs. It is light in the midst of darkness. So I encourage you to celebrate the Trinity today and every day.

To that holy and undivided Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be praise and glory this day and forever more. Amen.

[Trinity Sunday: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15.]