**To thee, blest Three in One**

June 4, 2023; Trinity Sunday

RCL Year A: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8;

2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

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***We sing to thee our praises, O Father, Spirit, Son; the Church her voice upraises to thee, blest Three in One.* Amen.**

It is a kind of joke among preachers- especially in larger communities where there are several people who preach regularly- that certain Sundays provoke an almost “Why me?” kind of response- and Trinity Sunday is one of them. (Please note that I did NOT pass this off to Father Fred, especially not after he just preached last week on the feast of Pentecost!) This little joke only makes sense if the preacher’s goal is to try and somehow make the mystery of the Trinity more comprehensible, because that would be an impossible task. Three Persons, who are somehow also fully One? All three known to us in distinct but equally lifegiving ways, in both glorious and deeply intimate moments of relationship, joined together in the unity of God’s very nature? It is no wonder that believers have struggled for most of Christian history to put language around the mystery of the Trinity using human reasoning and logic. As with anything that deeply touches our souls but we can never completely ***know***- such as the ageless and never-ending beauty of the sun rising and setting over the ocean- the more we try to understand the Trinity with our **heads** the further away it seems. Remember, beloveds, ***if we ever think we have anywhere near a complete understanding of God, then what we have is surely only of ourselves and not of God.***

I listen every week to an amazing podcast called Working Preacher on the lectionary readings for that Sunday, and this week the participants begged us to not use this feast day as the opportunity for a scholarly lecture about the Trinity, nor to try and shoehorn these readings into proving or explaining it centuries before any formal statement by the church, nor to get caught up in all the debates about the Trinity, some of which still continue today. I promise you I will do none of these things. Instead- what if we wondered about all the ways that our God as Three Persons is made real to us in our own life experiences, and through us to a world we have been called to serve in the very name of the Trinity: walking a way of discipleship, as our Gospel from Matthew calls us to do, that flows from the waters of baptism and offers new life through the sacraments and is grounded in the creative and lifegiving energy of God that has always been and will always be with us until the end of the ages.

Our readings today are all texts that lead us towards remembering and claiming how our experiences of God- both personal, and as a faith community that transcends space and time- have made God’s Self known to us. Within the liturgical framework of Trinity Sunday, they invite us to reflect not only on how we have known God in these three ways of being, but also on how our diverse experiences of God move us towards our work in the world. Where have we found ourselves co-creating with God- paying attention to the movement of God’s Spirit as the very same Spirit who was moving and active in Creation and since Creation? Where have we brought order out of chaos, beauty and abundance out of want, light out of darkness? How have we honored the truth that we are made in God’s image and so uniquely called to the work of making God’s creating love visible and real? As today’s psalm says- so beautifully, and with questions that we must each answer for ourselves: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in your courses- what is man that you should be mindful of him? The son of man that you should seek him out? You have made him but little lower than the angels…you give him mastery over the works of your hands.” Have we paid homage to how this God of majesty and glory- ***loving each of us so much that all the rest of God’s holy creation is at our mercy-*** in ways that awaken in others the longing to know and praise a God who creates like this?

Where have we, like the apostle Paul, shown others the grace and peace and love and community that can only flourish when we choose to see God in the center of all things, honoring all those around us as holy beings, fully beloved of God? Where have we been faithful to God’s invitation towards liberation for all people, towards restoration of order, towards blessing each other in ways that lift up the rich diversity of our gifts and talents, offered for the wholeness of this world God has created?

In our gospel, we hear what has become known as the ‘Great Commission’: the very end of Matthew’s gospel where the resurrected Jesus commissions the disciples- and therefore **us**- for this mission that will be ours as long as this earth shall endure. The One who was present with God in Creation calls upon his authority: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me…go therefore and make disciples of all nations”- linking together this command to spread the Good News with the mending of all that has been broken since God first created all things. This is, after all, far more than one final teaching by Jesus- it is a vision for how we, God’s people, are to serve and to live so that we help end all brokenness and division and encourage and unity and peace. Where have we seen **ourselves** called into God’s mission of reconciliation and discipleship, with baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the foundation for everything we do in community? How have **we-** those of us here gathered- been faithful to sharing in this work of healing and wholeness centered in our God who creates and calls us through an endless diversity of relationship, equipping us for this holy work in ways that unite us through our differences rather than divide us?

I believe that our encounters with God as Three Persons- Father, Son, and Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer; Way-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, or whatever words you may use to name them- are the ones that happen during the course of our ordinary lives- our paying attention to where God is showing up and is at work in the world right now and beckoning us into new ways of loving and serving. Our own experiences are the place we must begin: where **we** have seen God create something out of what felt like nothing, where **we** felt God’s redeeming love enfold us through the healing and compassion of Jesus, where **we** heard the breath of the Spirit whispering to us to serve in certain ways and in certain places. Each of these is a naming of how God is active in such endlessly different ways among us- and because of them we are fully equipped to invite others into seeing how God has been real and present to them as well. ***We- every blessed one of us-each created in God’s image- are the activity of the Trinity alive and at work in the world***. Pentecost has come and gone- God’s Spirit has descended on people of every race and language and nation, and now it is time to go and build a church that is eternally and gloriously alive with all that God has ever been and will ever be to God’s beautifully different people, living out God’s purpose in mission, on fire with God’s longing for the world.

On the inside cover of your bulletin is the text of hymn 363 from our 1982 Hymnal- we aren’t singing it today because the tune is tricky, but the words are really powerful and I’d like to close by reading them. This is the heart of the Trinity for me- God’s Self eternally giving to God’s people- and ourselves, offering in response our endless praise.

Ancient of Days, who sits enthroned in glory,

to thee all knees are bent, all voices pray;

thy love has blessed the wide world’s wondrous story

with light and life since Eden’s dawning day.

O holy Father, who hast led thy children

in all the ages with the fire and cloud,

through seas dry shod, through weary wastes bewildering

 to thee in reverent love our hearts are bowed.

O holy Jesus, Lord of our salvation,

calling the least, the last, the lost to thee,

summoning all to share thy new creation,

thou, Lord, by death has won life’s victory.

O Holy Ghost, the Lord and the Lifegiver,

thine is the quickening power that gives increase:

from thee has flowed, as from a mighty river-

our faith and hope, our fellowship and peace.

O triune God, with heart and voice adoring,

praise we the goodness that doth crown our days;

pray we that thou wilt hear us, still imploring

thy love and favor, kept to us always. **Amen.**