

Trinity Sunday, Year C

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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 | John 16:12-15 | Rohr, Richard 2016 *The Divine Dance: the Trinity and Your Transformation*

For those who may not know, this morning we find ourselves present in Trinity Sunday. It's a feast day in the church when we hear readings about the trinity. That is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I'm also grateful that we get such readings as that of Proverbs which reminds us of the vastness of God's being and that God is not beholden only to masculine imagery but contains also the feminine as represented by Wisdom, and all gender being between and beyond. In addition to such readings, this is a Sunday that holds a long, proud tradition of pastors trying with inexpressible frustration to explain what the Trinity is to their congregations and, if I'm gonna be honest, to themselves.

But, in spite of the historical confusion associated with the Trinity as a thing, I'm going to give it a shot. Some pastors have used the imagery of a three-leaf clover. Others of water being liquid, solid, and gas to explain the trinity. I'm partial to a 15th-century icon from Andrei Rublev, entitled the Trinity. The icon depicts three persons in robes of different colors sitting together at a table over a meal. Their eyes gaze towards one another as they seem to share the moment together. The image draws one's eyes in a circle, never stopping, always looking into the next person of the three.

And that movement of one's eyes drawn by the icon, the constant circling of careful awareness between the three, conceived of as God the Father, or if we want to remove that gendered language, God the creator, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, that motion conveys love between the three. It is this sense of love between them that moves me when I think of the trinity.

I hold also the many critiques I've heard of the Christian religion including the critique of trying to shoehorn three gods into one and claim monotheism. Critics and commentators have ridiculed the attempt to justify the Trinity, believing a foolishness in trying to harmonize the history of the Christian story and the New Testament to say that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one in order to maintain some monolithic notion of Christianity. Put plainly it seems to some that the Trinity, historically and confusing as it is, is just not worth it. It really might be easier to have a monolithic God. And there is a way in which I sympathize with such critique, that it would be much simpler to dispatch the Trinity in favor of a God uncomplicated by such an idea. In fact, a number of Christian ideologies and practices don't bother themselves with the Trinity in favor of a God who is less complicated.

That said, a Christian God uncomplicated by the thought of the Trinity has been, I think, prone to being seen as unrelatable and even tyrannical over humanity. For many, God is a source of power interested first and foremost in having humanity love him through adherence to

apparently clear and strict laws exterior to our lives which would in turn make our lives better. Such was a belief I held in years gone by, a belief that it was better to have God outside of ourselves guiding us to correct how bad and wrong we are.

Speaking from Christian circles of which I was a part, this monolithic God is the God who tells. Who humans have believed he was telling us it is wrong for a person to love someone of the same gender, he told pale-skinned land owners that they could justly own dark-skinned people too. Who told me how to be a man and a good friend who transitioned how they needed to be a woman. Who has told and told yet for all God's telling has left so many so alone and hurt. And though there are Christian ideologies that include both the Trinity and such imagery of God's judgment, I have been increasingly grateful for the Trinity. Because I think the Trinity has helped lead me toward less judgment of others and self-hatred in favor of greater love and a visible awareness of God in our day-to-day lives.

And this is because the Trinity is, to me, about relationship. The relationship between God the creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Relationship not unlike what we hold for one another. In fact, I'd argue this idea of the Trinity is what has kept me coming back to church. It has not been monolithic notions of God as hurler of flaming pillars or even grand arbiter of heaven and hell that has kept me in church. It has been the relational work of the triune God shown in the relationships of people in church who have been there for me when I was hurting and who accepted those things which I sought to offer. The Trinity's power has been the power in the love clearly displayed between others and I believe the greatest power of God is that of relationship; the act of people looking to another in love as those three visions of divinity look toward one another in Rublev's icon of the Trinity.

So there it is. If Bishop Jeff Lee had a Book of Common Prayer held to my head and said "Fr. George, I'm going to defrock you unless you define the Trinity for me," I'd say the Trinity is God in relationship. I might even say simply the Trinity is relationship — that fraught, messy, mysterious way in which we try to know one another and try to be known.

The Trinity reminds us that God is not so exterior to our lives as I think we might be tempted to believe, but it is as mundane, wonderful, and visible as our greetings to one another. The Trinity's meaning and power was on display this Friday at Sophie Parker's funeral as members of this place loved in memory a good woman who had loved St. Mark's. The Trinity's significance was on display not long ago when three of our youth, Julius, Jay, and Blake, I think in love, whooped my sorry behind in Mario Kart in Ian's office. The Trinity reminds us to follow God's call to pursue right, healthy and loving relationships with those around us.

One last note on that icon from Rublev. While it shows those three figures seated and gazing at one another, there's one interesting in detail towards the bottom of the image. If you ever take a chance to look at it, you may notice a small rectangular space beneath the table. That spot is believed to be a relief that held a mirror. The implication being that the Trinity not only invites God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit but also the viewer. You. God intends not to be something

exterior. The trinity that is God invites you into relationship — into seeing the sacredness of the other — because that is where God resides. Amen.