

**Trinity Sunday  
June 16, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the spirit.  
Amen.**

Today, in the Christian calendar, is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday after the Feast of Pentecost. It is devoted to the theological concept of the Triune God ... One God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the roots of the Trinitarian formula are found in the Hebrew Scriptures, the theological principal was not formalized until the Council of Nicea in 325 of the Common Era.

In many ways it is this Trinitarian formula that distinguishes us from the other religions of the Book, that is, the religious faiths of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. It may distinguish us from Judaism and Islam, but I don't believe it separates us. We have more in common with each other than there is to separate us.

For our Sunday liturgy we are using a worship booklet instead of the Book of Common Prayer. One reason we use this worship booklet is that it contains a Eucharistic Prayer ... the prayer I say at the altar over the bread and wine ... the booklet contains a Eucharistic Prayer that is authorized by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church but is not found in the Book of Common Prayer. Also, in the worship booklet, instead of using the Nicene Creed for our affirmation of faith, we used a Declaration of Faith that comes from the Moravian Book of Worship. A little known fact is that the Episcopal Church and the Moravian Church are in "full communion" which means that we can use parts of their worship service and they can use parts of ours. It also means that their ordained clergy can celebrate the Eucharist in our churches and the Episcopal Church's ordained clergy can celebrate in the Moravian Church.

Bishop Howard, on visit a number of years ago, asked about our use of the Declaration of Faith instead of the Nicene Creed. I explained that it was from the Moravian Book of Worship. He looked a little perplexed and then said, "Well, at least it is Trinitarian."

Now, I know the concept of the Trinity is important to many, and I know that it is the role of the Bishop to "defend the faith." However, after four decades of ordained ministry my faith is not determined by my theological "beliefs" ... those concretized statements of our creeds. Rather ... for me ... it is determined by "trusting" ... trusting that there is a loving God who wants me, and all humanity, to live in the fullness of life. I therefore feel that Trinity Sunday is more about how we experience God than about trying to define something that is beyond explanation.

Jews, Christians and Muslim are all spiritual descendants of Abraham. Jews look to Abraham as an ancestor through Jacob, born of Sarah. Christians also look to Abraham as an ancestor

through Jacob, born of Sarah because Jesus was Jewish. Muslims look to Abraham as an ancestor through Ishmael, born of Hagar who was Sarah's handmaiden that she gave to Abraham to bear a child when Sarah was barren. Since all three faiths look to Abraham as an ancestor they are often referred to as the People of the Book. Yet in today's world people tend to look at the difference rather than to embrace what we hold in common ... indeed we are all sisters and brothers to each other.

I think that at least part of the reason we focus on differences rather than what we hold in common has to do with language, and the language of "beliefs." In an attempt to put words to our experiences of the holy we have used different words in different cultures. Yet I think it is the experience of the holy that brings us closer together. I think our faith is based more on our experience of God than on the beliefs that define us. This is less about intellectual assent to creeds, and more about knowing and trusting God to be present.

I began this sermon, as I do with each of my sermons, with the invocation:

In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.

If the divine spark of God exists anywhere than that divine spark was present at the beginning of our universe ... in that immensely dense particle that exploded in the Big Bang and thus is in every piece of stardust that makes up all of creation ... which includes each one of us. Astronomers tell us today that there are over two trillion galaxies in the universe, and each of those galaxies has billions of stars. Most of those stars have planets circling them, and "moons" circling the planets.

Do you know how large one trillion is? In English speaking countries it is 1 followed by 12 zeros. In most non-English speaking countries it is 1 followed by 18 zeros. I don't know which trillion the astronomers are talking about, but two trillion galaxies is a lot of galaxies ... and then each galaxies has billions of stars. And, the God of all Creation is the God of all those stars, and planets, and moons ... and every single atom in this entire universe.

So here we are, one small planet circling around one modest size star, in one of those two trillion galaxies, trying to define the God of Christianity against the God of the Jews, or the God of Islam, or the God of the Hindus, or the God of all the other religions on this planet. Just who do we think we are? I honestly don't think we can put the God of all Creation in a box. No matter how we might want to define God ... God is always more than that.

The God of all Creation brought forth life as we know it on this planet. As humanity evolved different groups of peoples spread out in different directions, making their own life in the various environments they found. As peoples and cultures grew in sophistication they began to put words to their experience of a holy presence ... each in the context of their own physical and social environment. Our bible is the story of one such people, the Jews, and their experience of the relationship they knew. One of those Jews was a man named Jesus who lived

a life so full of the holy that people saw God alive in him. Jesus taught about what the world might look like if we were to allow God to be in charge ... he called it the Kingdom of God. He brought people into the fullness of life ... the lame walked, the blind could see, the deaf could hear. He railed against a religious belief system that separated peoples into us and them. And in his teachings ... and his actions ... people saw God alive in Jesus.

So, what about God's Spirit? These people of different faith expressions found the power of God "when two or three are gathered." They found God's Spirit in community ... from nuclear family to the worldwide human race. God's Spirit is present and at work when people gather as congregations, as a village, as a tribe, as a people bound by language. God's Spirit does not know national boundaries, and God's Spirit is at work among peoples separated by rivers, who live beyond mountains, and who occupy distant shores. God's Spirit is present and at work when people are in harmony, and God's Spirit is present when there is discord. God's Spirit calms the troubled soul, and it challenges apathy. God's Spirit abhors the status quo, yet it also dispels the fears that accompany change.

We are a people of faith. We are people who experience the holy in our lives. The words we use in our creeds are those that have been handed us by the Christian Church, but the experience of the holy transcends those words. That is the difference between trusting in the God we know, and making an intellectual assent to a set of concretized "beliefs."

This week I visited a woman who stopped her chemotherapy for lung cancer and chose to enter hospice homecare. She is not a member of the congregation, but her daughter, and the daughter's wife, live in Lincolnville, and I had baptized the couple's infant twins a year or so ago. One of the godmothers, another daughter of the woman I visited, has three children, and when they came to the baptism she asked if I would baptize them as well. So the woman's five grandchildren were all baptized in this church ... that is why I got a call asking to visit this dying woman.

After we had talked for a while, I asked her why she had decided to end her chemotherapy. She said, "Every night I lie in bed and talk to God. When the doctor told me that I would go through another round of chemotherapy treatments, and then they would do a PET scan to see what the lung cancer looked like, something hit me. I know I am going to die, but I don't know when. I can either let the doctor decide that, or I can let God decide that. I really don't want to know what my cancer looks like, and I hate the chemotherapy. So, I talk to the doctor very rarely, but I talk to God every night ... I decided to just put it in God's hands."

I asked her if she was afraid of death. She paused, took a deep breath, and said, "No." And, as she made the sign of the cross she said, "I see it as a melding. When I lie in bed at night and pray I know I am praying to the Father. When I was sitting in the chair getting my chemotherapy I knew that Jesus... the Son ... was with me. And, I'm now living with my daughter and grandchildren, and you've come to visit. That is like the Spirit. And when I die I think they will all meld together and be One with God and all who are with God."

I wasn't exactly dumbfounded, but I, too, knew the Spirit was there with the two of us at that moment. I said, "Do you know that this Sunday is Trinity Sunday?" She started to cry. I asked her if she minded if I shared what she had to say with others. She responded, "You mean other people think like I do?" I answered, "Lots of people.!"

The Trinity may be a theological concept that separates our "beliefs" from other religions. But, when we experience God in different ways, and articulate that experience, we are talking about having a faith ... not about the concretized words that try to capture "beliefs" in some kind of creedal formula.

You see, faithful people of all religions experience God when they are struck with awe at the sight of a sunset behind a storm cloud. Or, when they see the soul of another in their frightened eyes as they plead for acceptance. Or when the stranger they try to avoid becomes the angel with a gift. You know you are a person of faith when you see a child being born, or an elder die ... and you know it is a sacred moment. You are a person of faith when your prejudice is broken by recognizing the face of the other as your own ... when the wilderness into which you have been driven becomes the path to a new life. You know you are a person of faith when you see God in the life around you ... when you are surprised by the divine presence in you and recognizing the divine presence in your enemy. You are a person of faith when God's Spirit shocks you out of your ordinary life into an extraordinary reality.

We live in a world where we take too much for granted, live in fear of those who look, dress, speak, act, or think differently from us, and we seek security by building unshakable lives. However, God, in creating us, made us in God's image, and calls us to fullness of life, not merely a secure existence. In Jesus God gave us the example of one who lived that full life, trusting in God to provide, and giving of himself so that we, too, might all know that fullness of life. Jesus died on the cross because he threatened the systems of security in both the religious and political establishments ... he threatened a concretized set of beliefs. However, the grave could not hold the divine nature of God that was alive in Jesus, and his Resurrection speaks to the new life beyond what we see as death. And God's Spirit, which was present at Creation, is still with us now, opening for us the immense possibilities of living as if we are one worldwide community, each individual a precious divine spark, each and every person, regardless of tribe, or language or nation is a child of God.

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The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.

Amen.