

Year A, Trinity Sunday
Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8;
2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20
St. Catherine's Episcopal Church

Today is Trinity Sunday. On this Sunday, we bring to a close our celebration of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This Sunday before we move into what is called ordinary time where we study Jesus' parables and works is a time of reflection. This the only day of the church year that calls us to ponder a teaching of the church rather than a teaching of Jesus. Some feasts mark events in the life of Christ, like Christmas or Easter. Other feasts mark events in the life of the Church, such as Pentecost, but this is the only feast that marks a doctrine. Although our scripture readings for today, especially Paul's letter to the Corinthians and the passage from Matthew's Gospel, give us a vision of the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this creedal understanding didn't become Church doctrine until the Councils of the fourth century when the Nicene Creed we pray each Sunday came into being.

Other images give meaning to this three-fold trinitarian relationship—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Today's Hebrew Testament reading looks at God as Creator. There's a story told that weaves together the two distinct creation stories found in Chapters 1 and 2, and the story of the serpent from Chapter 3 of Genesis. It's alleged to be a child's book report on the Bible. "In the beginning, which happened near the start, there was nothing but God, darkness, and some gas. God said, 'Give me a light!' and someone did. Then God made the world. God split the Adam and made Eve. Adam and Eve were naked, but they weren't embarrassed because mirrors hadn't been invented yet. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating one bad apple, so they were driven from the Garden of Eden...not sure what they were driven in though, because they didn't have cars." That's how one child sees it.

God's work of creation didn't stop with Genesis. As God was creator, so he still is creator. He has created each of us, and he dwells within each of us—we, made in his image and baptized into the life of Christ. Just as the Trinity is about a relationship of three-in-one, so our lives with God are about relationship—with God and with one another. It's a progression—we are created, knit in the womb by a God who loves us; we are redeemed through Christ's death and resurrection; and we are sustained to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ. It's a continuing invitation into relationship with God. Take a look at the cover of your bulletin for a moment. This is a much-loved icon created by the Russian iconographer Rublev in the 15th century. You see three angels seated around a table. This was Rublev's way of depicting the Trinity in relationship. For those who might be students of body language, take a look at what they're saying to us, the viewer. You'll notice that two of them incline their heads toward the third angel, who represents God. They are all equal, they are all open to one another, and they are all open to each of us. Do you notice that there seems to be a fourth place at the table that is empty? That's for us! We are invited to be present at this feast. As Henri Nouwen wrote, "As we place ourselves in front of the icon in prayer, we come to experience a gentle invitation to participate in the intimate conversation that is taking place among the three divine angels and to join them around the table."

What does this dinner table conversation sound like? A few years ago, the Diocese of Nevada sponsored a seminar called the Magnetic Church. Some of you attended the event. I think a lot of the things we heard at that seminar might be a part of this table conversation. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus gives us a commission, the Great Commission: he tells us to go, to make disciples, to baptize them into relationship with God and to teach them to live as he commanded us. That's what this seminar was about. It was about reaching out to those who are seeking, and inviting them to walk this journey of faith with us.

The fellow who presented the seminar is named Andy Weeks. Some of you had a chance to meet Andy when he came here to St. Catherine's. Andy's been doing this work full-time for almost twenty-five years. He wasn't always a committed Christian. He grappled with faith and with church. He described God's influence on him like that of a hand placed between his shoulders, pushing and coaxing and prodding him forward. That hand pushed him in the door of a church in Massachusetts one Sunday. A fellow named John greeted him at the door that day and made him feel welcome. When he was leaving, Andy expressed concern that he didn't really know anyone there. John told him that he knew one person, namely John, and that he'd be there looking forward to seeing him the next week. Andy came back and became a member of that church.

In my case, it was a man named Charlie. He was the person who greeted me every week after I took my first tentative steps back into the Episcopal Church after a time away. Charlie greeted me over and over and kept trying to get me to fill out a newcomer's card. I resisted for several months, but Charlie, with his great smile and kind ways, didn't give up. That was in 1993, and, as they say, the rest is history.

The things people are looking for in their spiritual lives are present here with us. Princeton Theological Seminary published a study in 2007. In it they listed the six basic spiritual needs we all have. These are: to believe that life is meaningful and has a purpose; to have a sense of community and deeper relationships; to feel appreciated and respected; to be heard and listened to. We want to feel we are growing in faith; and, we want practical spiritual help in developing a mature faith. Incidentally, the only thing that teenagers add to this conversation is a need to be trusted, and to be able to trust. As a faith community, we have all this. We can do all this. It's about inviting people in. It's about welcoming those who come to explore with us. It's about opening up God's Word. It's about breaking bread together. It's about forming relationships with God and with one another.

I see these kinds of relationships right here within the St. Catherine's community. Last week, a member of the congregation approached me and asked if I had heard from two of our congregants who hadn't been at church the last few weeks. This couple has had its share of health issues, and she was concerned about them. I was able to reassure her that they were doing well and were actually away for a few weeks. She had already placed a call to them and left a message that she hoped they were doing well. Another congregant told me of a member of our congregation who had taken her plant shopping and helped her get them situated in her planter box so that she had a bright and inviting bit of color greeting her and others at her front door.

That's Trinitarian relationship right here in our midst.

Someone once said that the sign of God's presence with you is that your feet are where you didn't expect them to be. Maybe when you first came here, you didn't expect your feet to be here. Maybe someone's welcoming smile caused you to come back. Maybe this is your first time here with us, and you didn't expect your feet to be here. I hope you feel welcome. We're all on a journey with the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer—or as St. Augustine said, with the Lover, the Beloved and the Love that binds us together.

On this Trinity Sunday, we are not called to celebrate a doctrine. We are called to celebrate relationship and to take that relationship out into the world. Let us pray. O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.