

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
Trinity Sunday/Year B
May 27, 2018
Text: Romans 8:12-17 and John 3:1-17

“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad!”

There is an old medieval story told about a great doctor of the Church, St. Augustine of Hippo, who one day walked along a beach. He was deep in thought trying to comprehend the mystery of the Trinity.

As he walked along he came across a small boy. The child was running back and forth from the shoreline, his short legs flying as fast as they could, and emptying a seashell filled with water into a hole he had dug in the sand. After watching for a while Augustine came up to him and asked the little boy what he was doing. The boy looked at him and told Augustine that he was putting the ocean into the hole. Augustine chuckled and told him that that was impossible. The hole couldn't possibly hold all that water. The boy sweetly replied, “It is just as impossible for you to comprehend the mystery of the Trinity.” And the boy vanished.

Yes, it is Trinity Sunday, the last major feast for a while in the Church calendar. We may ask ourselves, ‘Of all things, why do we celebrate the Trinity? Why do we celebrate such an abstract theological concept? Even a first grader knows that one plus one plus one equals three and yet how can three equal one and one equal three?’

It has been maybe five or so years now that at diocesan convention, Bishop Smith, has placed somewhere in our meeting spaces, an icon of the three angels, similar to what you see on today's bulletin cover. It is a variation of the artist Rublev's ‘Trinity’ painted to re-tell a story found in the Book of Genesis where Abraham and Sarah showed hospitality to three strangers (Genesis 18:1-15). “The Christian imagination,” explained Bishop Smith, “has it that they are showing hospitality to God, in the three persons-or in the case is in the icon, God is showing hospitality to us. The three persons, ethereal, other-worldly, belong together; in fact they are bound together through their body language and gestures. The opening at the table is toward us, the viewers, welcoming us into God own feast and God's own life.”

Being a lover of art books since I was child, I had seen Rublev's rendition and others like it many times over but never really made the connection. But in considering this portrait, I began to see understand something that goes beyond the usual images of the Trinity with God the Father wearing a long flowing white beard, the Son still bearing the nail prints of his crucifixion, and the Holy Spirit as a dove hovering over both. In this icon we see not only an invitation but a deep and profound statement of love and relationship. God's very being is a relationship of three persons who deeply love each other and invites us to join in this relationship. And this is what we celebrate on the Feast of the Holy Trinity—the love and the relationship which are the essence of God.

Who is God? God is love and God is relationship. And God's love and God's relationship has been since before the beginning of time. God's love and relationship has always been since God separated the heavens from the earth and flung stars into the night sky and breathed holy breath into humankind. We know of God's love and relationship in rainbows and new beginnings, in the parting of seas and in lands flowing with milk and honey, in promises spoken through prophets and in the fulfillment of those promises, in the birth of a child in the stable, in healings and teachings and feedings, in the ultimate act of love, and in an empty tomb. We see God's love and relationship through the persistence of those early witnesses, martyrs, and missionaries, in the forming of communities and the Church. We know of God's love and relationship and we talk about this love and relationship because that is what Jesus spoke of continually as he walked bodily upon this earth. Jesus never tired of speaking of love and relationships. Over the last several weeks we have heard Jesus speaking of these things. He said,

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.”

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.”

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

“Abide in me as I abide in you.”

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.”

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

God is love. God is relationship. This is who God is. This is how we experience God in the world. This loving and Triune God is ever present in every aspect of our lives, whether we are aware of God's presence or not. For in God we live and move, and have our being.

The great apostle Paul reminds us that this true, that there is something so great between us and God that we can be called children of God. That that love and relationship so bonds us that we can call God "Abba! Father!" We are so joined that God's Spirit bears witness that we are not only God's children but heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

God is love. God is relationship. And these two gifts in particular are meant to be shared by us who are loved by God. The writer of John relays to us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

I had the occasion to be with some old friends at a Pentecost Revival this week at Saints Teresa and Bridget Roman Catholic Church located near the Rock Church and the Fox Theater. Yes, we got our praise on. My friend, Fr. Manuel from Montgomery, Alabama, was the preacher and there was some fine singing and worship. Oh, I needed that! Anyway, Fr. Manuel touched on this very passage, "For God so loved the world..." He reminded us that 'God so loved the world, the whole world. God loved and loves everybody. Scripture doesn't say that God only loves those who think like we do, or talk like we do, or dress like we do. God loves us in spite of ourselves and we were created to share this love, to be with one another.

We often operate out this funny notion that we don't need anyone else. "I can do bad all by myself" the title of a movie says. But if we understand even this much (fingers together)...God's way of thinking challenges this notion. As Fr. Manuel said, "It's good thing that we ain't in charge!"

When we realize God's love then we are compelled to do the right things by others. We will speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. When we realize God's love we will roll down our car windows and give that person standing on the corner a dollar or a few coins. When we realize God' love we will pay forward a good deed done on our behalf. When we realize God' love we will march or write and call those in power and say, 'no more of this foolishness. Let's, please, do right by folks.' When we realize God's love we will treat someone well even though they may grate on our last nerve. When we realize God's love we will

look beyond somebody else's faults because God love them just as much as God loves you and me. When we realize God's love we will even love ourselves.'

Out of the Father's abundant love, the Son was sent into the world. Out of abundant love the Son stretched out his arms on the cross and rose again. Out of our Savior's abundant love was sent the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, who creates, motivates and inspires. Three in one, one in three.

The Feast of the Trinity is not just an article of faith or a theological doctrine. It is a feast of love and relationship and being. A feast of mystery that invites the world to participate in God's life.

Look at your bulletin covers again for a moment. See that space again. You and I are invited to take our places at the table, and at this Table, invited into the Triune God's loving relationship. We are to invite others to also take their seats alongside us, to join this circle of connectedness and love.

Blessed be God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Amen!