

Pastor Kris Litman-Koon
Date: 7 June 2020, Trinity Sunday
Lesson: Genesis 1:24-31, Matthew 28:16-20

Take a moment to think of all the “holy” days that make their way into the church calendar. They all fit into two categories that are determined by what they are based on: either events recorded in scripture, or events/people in church history. Today, however, stands out as a unique holy day in our church calendar. Trinity Sunday is our one holy day that is based on a doctrine. Many of us were likely introduced to the doctrine of the Trinity while sitting at a table and listening to a teacher or a clergy member do their best to teach us this doctrine: there is one God, yet that one God is three persons -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are not names for different parts of God, because there is only one being. The three persons of the Trinity share the same essence or nature, though they are unique.

And off we go. It is easy to begin a path of expounding on this doctrine’s concepts. Countless faithful people throughout the centuries have filled volumes by exploring what is truly *the* ultimate mystery: the nature of the Triune God. To do so is not wrong. In fact, it is a good thing. However, it can leave us with the impression that engaging with “God” is an intellectual or academic endeavor. Engaging with God can be like that, but it is not solely an act of intellect, nor is that even the best way. Because the testimony of the Bible is that God has always desired first and foremost a relationship with the people, not just their intellectual assent. Even when we get into the history books of how the discovery of the triune God’s nature came to be, it was not formulated by a committee sitting around arguing over philosophical concepts. The discovery of the Trinity came to be over the course of centuries of people giving witness to how God encountered them in their daily living. That wasn’t just long ago; we still have these lived encounters where God shows up in and among humanity for the benefit of humanity.

God loves humanity. I don’t understand why such a statement would be controversial, but there are some people who bristle and push back on this idea: God loves humanity. This love story starts in the first chapter of scripture when God creates humanity in God’s image, and stepping back to view the finished creation, God declares that it is very good. This love for humanity continues all

the way to the last chapter of scripture, when God ushers people from all tribes and nations into the New Creation. People of faith have experienced God as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we have grown to understand God in this way, one thing should jump out at us: the triune God is in relationship. The persons of the Trinity are in an eternal flow of relationship with one another; it is the truest and purest sense of love. So when God calls us into a relationship, this request is not a concept that is foreign to God. Relationship is at the core of God's essence.

Right in the middle of the grand biblical story is the most profound example of the triune God's love for humanity: when the second person of the Trinity, the Son, takes on flesh and lives among us. The Son took on the flesh of a human whose land was occupied by the Roman army. The Son touched those who had been deemed untouchable. The Son engaged with those who were corrupt and with those who were marginalized. The Son offered God's love to those who were unforgivable and to those whose families no longer welcomed them. Then, by accepting a death on the cross, the Son revealed the incomprehensible extent of God's love for humanity. The inglorious death of God reveals God's commitment to be among those who this world looks down on. Because God willfully took on the indignity of the cross, the resurrection is proof that God dignifies people who are denied their dignity. The resurrection reveals that God's mercy is for those who are deprived of mercy. The resurrection shows that God's love for humanity cannot be squashed, it cannot be contained or limited.

I have a little exercise for us. If there is someone in your vehicle who is left-handed, let that person give a honk of the horn. [honks] Okay. Left-handed people, honk the horn again if you are regularly reminded in subtle ways that you live in a world that is designed for right-handed people. [result: same number of honks... some sustained for emphasis] Most left-handed people will say that these subtle reminders occur daily. Before I first witnessed this exercise, I -- as a right-handed person -- could only point out my Jeep's manual gear shift as something that benefited me as a right-handed person. I had no idea there were numerous other ways that the world benefits my right-handedness, and I certainly wasn't aware that my left-handed siblings frequently experience these as annoyances at best and obstacles at worst.

That is analogous to the experience of racism in our society. It's not always obvious to me how something in society may advantage me as a white male. But the advantages are definitely there. To point this out is not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with being white, just as there is nothing inherently wrong with being right-handed. It also doesn't mean that a white person can't experience hardships in life; it's just that being white isn't one of the things that makes life harder.

Why point this out? As someone who claims that God's love for humanity is revealed most clearly on the cross, and as someone who believes that the Trinity's essence is relationship, I am compelled by God to listen to the cries of people.

Obviously many of our black siblings are crying out to be heard right now. Let's do the soul searching and the work to better understand their cries, even if it makes us uncomfortable. Our reason -- as Christians -- to do this work is threefold: 1) black lives bear God's image, 2) the Son is present wherever humanity is in pain, and 3) the Holy Spirit compels the Church to bring love and dignity to anyone who has been deprived of them.

Like I said earlier, we too often think of the doctrine of the Trinity as an intellectual undertaking. We think it's relevance is limited to books or classrooms. The reality, though, is that the Trinity is revealed whenever God encounters people. God will continue to show up in our lives. God loves you, and is present in you. God loves your neighbor, and is present in your neighbor. May the Trinity's outpouring of love compel us to always seek a deeper relationship with God and with our neighbor. Thanks be to God. Amen.