

Sermon for the Feast of the Holy Trinity  
Sunday, June 12, 2022 – Preached at Emmanuel-Norwood  
Texts: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

I.N.J.

Today is the hinge on which the entire church year swings; or if you like, today is the set of three hinges on which the year swings. From Advent to Pentecost, we gather around the story of how, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And from next week to the end of the church year, we will gather around the story of how God is fashioning a new form of human community which lives out the words and deeds of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Today we pause to celebrate the heart and sum of the entire story. Today is the feast of the Holy Trinity, a celebration of the Holy Communion who was, who is, who is to come.

This is the only day of the church year which doesn't somehow commemorate an event, an event in the life of Christ or in the church. Some folks observe this day as the celebration of a doctrine, and by that is meant the celebration of an explanation. There is plenty of room in the church for good thinking about the God we meet in Jesus, for good teaching about this God and paths to which this God calls us. But let's be clear about something. Trinity Sunday is more about contemplation than explanation. We are invited to contemplate the mystery who lives at the heart of the Bible's entire story, the mystery who lives in, with, and under all creation. And we are invited to contemplate our participation in that mystery.

Orthodox Jews are in the habit of pulling at least two all-nighters a year, both connected with festivals. They just pulled one of those all-nighters last week, on the night before Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks. On this festival, they celebrate God's giving of the Torah to Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. In the synagogue morning service, they read Exodus 19 and 20, the story of the gift of the Ten Commandments. To get ready for the celebration, they stay up the entire night before the service doing Bible study. People are free to choose whatever portion of the Bible they want to study, but frequently people will study the opening and closing chapter of each book of Bible.

The next all-nighter is in the fall on the night before Simchat Torah, which means rejoicing in God's guidance. This is the sabbath service that marks the end of lectionary cycle. Jews read through the first five books of the Bible every year, and so on Simchat Torah they read the last portion of Deuteronomy. So to get ready for this festival, Orthodox Jews throw an all-night party, eat a lot of food, and try to read through the first five books of the Bible in one night!

I think we should do something like that to get ready for Trinity Sunday because Trinitarian teaching is simply the church's shorthand summary of the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments. In Christ, we meet the God who suffers. Our God is not some remote Being sitting on a throne in some far away heaven, unconcerned about whether we live or die. No, in Christ, we have come

to know God as Emmanuel, the God who is so with us that God suffers because of us, for us, and with us. The doctrine of the Trinity is the way the Church tells the story of Jesus as the story of God, and at the heart of that story is a cross. As we tell this story, the cross marks the entrance of human history with all its pain and evil into the very heart of God in order to transform both God and us.

Paul gives us insight into what this means for us in today's second reading. Through Christ's trusting faithfulness to God's Way, Paul says, we have been brought into a right relationship with God. And as God suffers in Christ, so we can boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces a kind of trinity in us, a triad of patient endurance, of proven character, and of hope poured out by the Spirit who suffers with us. These three, suggests Paul, will be "produced" in us whenever and wherever we trust God's Way with Christ's own brand of faithfulness. And that means, shaking off the dull stupor that constantly threatens to anesthetize us by blinding us to the vast suffering all around us. Christ's own brand of faithfulness invites us, summons us into the work of justice, knowing full well that as far as our eye can see, the work will never end.

Martin Luther made a very powerful observation about today's Gospel reading. We hear Jesus say to his disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." Luther understood the passage in this way:

Here Christ refers to a conversation carried on in the Godhead, a conversation in which no creatures participate. He sets up a pulpit both for the speaker and for the listener. He makes the Father the Preacher and the Holy Spirit the Listener. Here it is relevant to [remember] that Scripture calls our Lord Christ — according to His divine nature — a "Word" (John 1:1) which the Father speaks with and in Himself. Thus these are two distinct Persons: He who speaks and the Word that is spoken, that is, the Father and the Son. Here, however, we find the third Person following these two, namely, the One who hears both the Speaker and the spoken Word. For it stands to reason that there must also be a listener where a speaker and a word are found. All this speaking, being spoken, and listening takes place within the divine nature and also remains there, where no creature is or can be. All three — Speaker, Word, and Listener — are God Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Friends, there is a conversation deep at the heart of things, a divine conversation in, with, and under all creation. Luther is right. We cannot know the details of this conversation, But because, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we do know Jesus, I think we can make a pretty good guess about what is being discussed. Love. Love. It's all about love.

In the name of God, the Voice, the Word, and the Listener. Amen.

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6/12/2022

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's Works, Volume 24, pp. 363-365.