

A Sermon for
Trinity Sunday/Confirmation Sunday
June 7, 2009
Texts: Isaiah 6:1-8
Romans 8:12-17
John 3:1-17

“Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here I am, send me!’” Isaiah 6:8

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ -- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” Romans 8:14-17

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above...Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be from from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who born of the Spirit...And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 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. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:3,7, 14-17

The Lutheran church has had many “traditional” days for celebrating Confirmation. Some have confirmed on Reformation Sunday, I guess because of confirmation instruction’s focus on Luther’s Small Catechism. Sometimes confirmation has been held on Palm Sunday. In recent decades the trend has been to hold confirmation on Pentecost. For one, because of its focus on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which has its baptismal reference as it is at our baptism, we say, that the Holy Spirit is first introduced into our lives. Also, Pentecost tends to fall at the end of the school year which makes it a timely conclusion for confirmation instruction. Well, this year circumstances have led us to hold confirmation on Trinity Sunday for a change. To tell you the truth, this day also has much commending it as an appropriate day for confirmation, for the affirmation of baptism. For the Trinity stands at the center of the baptismal liturgy. We baptize, as Jesus commanded, in the name of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Today we rejoice with Morgan as she affirms her baptism, as she acknowledges her adoption as a child of God, a sister of Jesus Christ. Today we celebrate with her that she is a member of the trinitarian family, part of the family of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity stands at the heart of our faith. It is how we came to describe our experience with encountering the divine. An ultimately indescribable mystery of one God being met in three ways, in three persons, but still one God. And while many analogies have been used over the years to try to help elevate our understanding, analogies will always fall short of capturing the full nature of God. So over the years people have drawn on three leaf clovers, or water in its three forms, or the trinity of love -- lover, beloved, and the love. That last one gets us into one of the newer arenas of trinitarian discussion, which is the trinity as a model of the relationality of faith, a model of loving community.

I have emphasized with the confirmation class from time to time that Christian faith is about relationships, starting with our relationship with God and then expanding out to our relationships with other Christians, and ultimately the whole world. The intention of God, the work of Jesus Christ, and the activity of the Holy Spirit are about the restoration and renewal of relationships. The brokenness in the world stems from broken relationships, with God and one another. When we are separated or estranged from God and one another we are much more prone to acting in a selfish, self-serving way, of exploiting and using others. Restored or renewed relationships will be marked by mutual respect, compassion, and self-giving love.

One of the newer approaches to understanding the trinity is as a model of loving relationship. The trinity is in itself a community of loving relationship. Some like theologian Jurgen Moltmann suggest that it is only from the perspective of a trinitarian God that we can claim that "God is love," for love is never alone. For there to be "love" there must be more than one, there must be a lover and a beloved. In the trinity we have a model of this mutual interplay of love; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this communion of love, sometimes described as a dance of relationality and mutuality, what one does they all do, what one experiences they all experience. The trinity then becomes a model of community for the church and is what underlies such images of church community as St. Paul's idea of church as the body of Christ, all of us members of the body and of one another, suffering with one another, rejoicing with one another, loving one another.

So we can sing our opening hymn, one of the new ones in our hymnal, "Come, Join the Dance of Trinity," "the interweaving of the Three," who have "in love and hope, made room within their dance." The relationship of the Three having been described as a dance of love by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One of the classic Christian images of the Trinity is the Icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rublev. It's on the cover of the bulletin. Although painted in the 15th century, in its composition it well captures this dance of love and mutuality among the three persons of the Trinity. The originating idea for the painting is the story of Abraham and Sarah entertaining "three men", angels, outside their tent by the oaks of Mamre. The occasion at which they received the promise of the birth of their son Isaac. Earlier renditions of the picture included Abraham and Sarah, but Rublev chose to leave them out and focus on the three persons of God. The tree branch spreading above the head of the center person being the last reference to the Abraham story, the oak of Mamre. What is amazingly clever about this presentation is how the individual persons are unique in clothing and so on, but there seems to be a perfect harmony between them. The tilt of their heads, the angles of the shoulders, their hanging robes, and the extension of their feet seem to form an invisible circle, emphasizing their unity. This unity is

picked up by the sameness of their faces and how they seem to be gesturing or gazing at one another. You can't see it in the black and white copy on your bulletin, but all of them have blue in the garments that ties them together. And each holds a staff of equal length indicating they are one and equal in authority.

This oneness in authority and presentation highlights the idea that the action of each belongs to all. So while we often segregate the trinity into creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, in truth they all are creator, redeemer, and sanctifier. In the center of the table is a chalice with the head of a lamb in it, symbolic of the sacrifice Jesus made. The shape of the chalice is echoed, emphasized, in the shape formed by the inner edge of the robes of the two outer angels, with Christ, the center figure, in the middle of it. But perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the icon, something characteristic of many icons, is the way the artist has arranged the figures in such a way as to draw the viewer into the picture. The lines of the larger chalice, the tilt of the heads of the angels, the shape of the opening in the near side of the grouping, seems to invite us into their circle, invite us into their dance of love, to be participants in the divine life.

And that is perhaps the significance of Trinity Sunday, the significance of our baptism and the affirmation that Morgan will make today. God has invited us, his children in community, into the dance of his love and life. So that our community might come to resemble that of the trinity, one of mutual love and hope. Or as the hymn concludes, "Let voices rise and interweave, by love and hope set free, to shape in song this joy, this life: the dance of the Trinity." A new way to image the calling of our baptism, taking part in the dance of love, the dance of the Trinity.