

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

Trinity Sunday

(First Sunday after Pentecost)

June 11, 2006

Living in the Trinity

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Texts: Isaiah 6:1-8, Romans 8:12-17

When Jesus was put to death, this was obviously a great shock to the Jesus movement. His death put an end to the threat his growing movement posed for the Roman and Jewish state.

But it didn't -- and that is how the concept of the Trinity was born implicitly in the life and the language of resurrection of the once grieving disciples. A few centuries later the word Trinity was explicitly used to describe the living reality of God and Jesus and us.

Just don't get hung up on the word. Don't get hung up on abstractions. Luther colorfully said that a person becomes a theologian by living, by dying and by being damned, not by understanding, reading and speculating.

Trinity is like the word "democracy" in American culture -- a word that kind of sums up what we are trying to be as a nation. The task is not to dwell on democracy in the abstract, but to struggle in changing the mind of the electorate to vote for just laws -- in short to live, die and be damned struggling for justice.

We live in and then we may think about the Trinity -- and as paradoxical as this sermon is starting to turn into, do not talk about the Trinity, but live in it. Let me try to show you how.

We can tend to make our lives so complicated, when simplicity is what we need -- to be able to remember the simple things of life. The art is to be able to live in our modern complex world and yet not forget life's simplicities.

The great prophet Isaiah discovered such a simplicity -- of seeing the awe of God in the Temple. I really believe that Isaiah did. And when he sees God he is not struck down dead, or blinded, and he certainly doesn't expound a theory, but is given deeper insight into himself and life.

For this prophet is struck by shame and guilt that his life doesn't measure up to this glorious moment of having been chosen by God to see God in the Temple. I believe

your beholding the sacred in this sanctuary, of beholding the awe of the altar, of hearing words of wonder in these stumbling sentences, is your having found that simplicity in the midst of your complicated life.

The simplicity to a vision of God. Here's a context for living in the Trinity. For to articulate this simplicity requires, if not a sense of mystery, then at least a sense of puzzlement as to what the meaning of life is. People can be so busy they forget or even don't want to ask. Isaiah's vision occurred in this context, and God has given Isaiah that visionary solution. This great Isaiah text is in our hands full of the very same promise -- that if we ask ourselves the simple question about the meaning of life, Isaiah's vision will come alive to us too. How patient God is!

In the history of religion this divine patience has often been described in terms of God the Father -- for all kinds of reasons. I am not saying this usage is wrong or not useful. Only that father language often overlooks women and motherhood, and causes us and especially our children to assume that men have some divine right to be dominant. That is why we tone down the male language in our liturgy -- for ours and our children's sake.

Calling God "Father" means that the creator of us all and of the universe is a loving creator just as a loving dad and mom are partners in the creation of their children. In the real world of human parents, some of us know our mother as the loving creator and nurturer of our families; some of us know our father that way; some of us know both of them that way, and some of us might have a hard time ascribing such love to either of them. Yet, in the story of Jesus we simply see that God is the best mother and father of us all.

Whether you attach "father" or "mother" to God, the point is from analogy to loving parents -- with the emphasis on the loving. We were created in love. We were nurtured in love. And from this it follows that the universe is not a hopeless desert of merely cruel and adaptive evolutionary biology; it is and it is more than that.

In simplicity we affirm that the hidden creator has done this in love as our mom and dad did to create us. Living in the Trinity, then, means also that life is fundamentally good even in the face of Auschwitz, AIDS, death in Iraq and on the streets of our city, and in the fight against religiously sanctioned bigotries.

Our early foremothers and forefathers saw on the cross of Jesus all that was bad and were given, like Isaiah, the vision that all that is good is in Christ being raised. (It's not about my talking. It's about living and endowing life with such simple and deep meaning.)

Or consider this: There are days when life can get us down. Death, illness, a boring job, many things -- or sometimes just nothing but everything turn us into our own

worst enemy. Hope fades. Our spirit lags. We become distracted, irritable or angry. It takes a lover, or a friend to help us right our keel. Or even a therapist. Or just coming to church. How is that living in the Trinity?

It often takes someone outside of ourselves to help us find our happy selves again. When we are taken to dinner we can feel so much better. When the pastor visits or when we slip into worship on Sunday morning, or have coffee afterwards, those caring others often help to bring us out from ourselves and we feel and live so much better. A spirit of hope arises in our hearts and we can, simply, go on to another day. And then we find that instead of turning in on ourselves, we turn our attention and care towards others and they too are lifted up a little or even sometimes a lot.

From the huddle of those first dispirited followers fixated on the now dead Jesus, something suddenly flowed into them from above. Inexplicably, they realized that Jesus had been raised from the dead. A spirit so holy that not only did they feel a sense of unworthiness like Isaiah in his vision, but also, like Isaiah, forgiven and empowered to speak, in this Spirit, God's words and not merely their own. To live in forgiveness, to claim their wholeness, as a gift from God given to them. They went out in peace and in joy.

This is what happens when we "just" come to church. This is what happens when we baptize with water and the word. This is what happens when words become to your ears the Word of God. This is what happens when we share the Eucharist -- together. And this is what flows into coffee hour afterwards and when we step back into our complicated worlds.

Because of Jesus, who simply lived for God and neighbor, and who was so unjustly killed, a Way of living life arose that found language that spoke in trinities. Living in an exciting Spirit, living in Christ, living with a sense of a loving Creator of this whole crazy affair. Living in the Trinity: the Loving Creator, Mother and Father, the living Christ who brings us back from ourselves, our sins and our selfish ways, and their living Spirit who proceeds from them. This is something of what living in the Trinity means. Live in it. Live in them. Live in God.

Amen.

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