

## **“In God’s Company”**

### **Sermon on Holy Trinity Sunday, June 16, 2019**

(Musings about a God in communion in a world of isolation)

Holy Trinity could be such an impossibly difficult topic if we want to talk about how this whole mystery works, this Three in One and One in Three thing, one God in the form of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons one being. Theologians, thinkers and philosophers have spent much time defining and trying to explain this stuff. I am not sure they have ever succeeded. Nor should they. It is, after all, a mystery.

Then again, Holy Trinity could be such an easy topic if we simply keep in mind that God exists and operates in community, that we are invited into God’s perpetual motion, the Holy One saying, “I never existed in isolation and neither should you.” In the Book of Genesis, in the first chapter, God says at the end of the creation story, “Let **us** make mankind in our image...” Much has been made about the “plural” pronoun here. Some interpreters of scripture wondered whether this was a remnant of past polytheism in Israel. Once upon a time the Israelites were surrounded by people who believed in multiple gods. Was this expression in Genesis 1 a slip into the old times? But again, I like to keep it simple. To me, the “us” in Genesis 1 is a reminder that God has always existed in community, enjoys to be in community and invites us to be in Holy Communion with Him, Her, Them, - hey, I don’t know which pro-noun to use when it comes down to it. It’s above my paygrade.

Let me explain why I believe this concept of the Holy Trinity can be helpful in our world today, even though it sounds like a museum piece from the 4<sup>th</sup> century when the philosophers of the Christian faith battled this all out with much fanfare and an impatient Emperor (Constantine the Great) waiting for results. You hear the reverberations of that heated conversation in the Nicene Creed formed during the same time. Whenever we confess this Creed, we use terminology like “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father.” Don’t ever think that this language was the product of someone just having a creative moment. Every single word in this creed was questioned, defended and argued over in the first worldwide Christian gathering of Christian bishops three hundred years after Jesus died, 325 in Nicaea. The center point of their discussions was our Lord himself. Was he true God? He looked awfully human on the cross, didn’t he? Did the creator create Christ, or did Christ exist before creation? Was he begotten or made? They argued over all these questions for many, many years, even long after these questions seemed to have been settled.

Now you probably want to tell me that these people had too much time on their hands. Maybe they all needed a real job. But try to understand: they were tackling the toughest theological problem of all time in the Christian faith. Was Jesus God? Or was he just a good, religious fellow pointing us to God? On that question hinges much of what we believe and what, to this day, distinguishes us from Jews, Muslims and others. It doesn’t separate us from them - we have far too much in common, but it distinguishes us. We believe that Jesus is God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, that Christ was there from the beginning, before the world was formed. Or, as John wrote at the beginning of his gospel: “In the beginning was the Logos (the Word), and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God.”

Powerful words.

The result of these discussions and deliberations was that Christians defined God as a Being that is in Community - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is not a man or a woman, or a single person. God is not the single holder of a title like king or ruler of the universe or something like that. God, the mystery behind all life, exists forever in community. And in fact, much of what science has unearthed about how the universe works, how our own bodies work, suggests that we all live in a very complex union of sorts. For instance, today we are much more aware of the fact that we share our bodies with billions of the tiniest microbes and we couldn't exist or be healthy without them. You and I could not be without these hordes of tiniest creatures that populate our guts. It is humbling.

Also, it is clear to us today that from our earliest days of coming to this earth, we need community. We need the touch of our mothers and the attention of people around us to help us become who we are. And yes, let's say we need some dads too. After all, it's Father's Day. Studies and experiments have shown that children literally cannot live or develop properly if they are left out in isolation. And even as adults, when we are sometimes tempted to think that we don't need others, we usually do. It's humbling.

There is, I believe, deep wisdom in the ancient teaching of the Holy Trinity, God existing in perpetual community of giving and receiving, listening and speaking. The kind of language that Jesus is constantly quoted with in the gospel of John, which sometimes sounds so annoyingly repetitive, all of a sudden makes more sense. "I am in the Father and the Father is in me..." "I am glorified in the father and the father glorifies himself in me..." On and on it goes in John 17. I haven't counted how many times Jesus speaks like that in the Gospel of John, but there are probably more than 20 expressions in that vein, especially in the later chapters. Losing ourselves in God's company, finding ourselves in God's company, inviting others into this God-community is what our faith is all about.

I do believe that we need this teaching of God in community more than ever before. For one, we sometimes live in this strange paradox of excessive communication on the one hand, especially via Social Media and then: isolation on the streets of our own neighborhood. People may have a friend in another part of the world they have never seen before and they don't know the person on their own street whom they have seen many times. It's the world we're in. When we invited some of Sarah's friends to the famous Thanksgiving Eve concert and get-together at the Fire Hall, a North Wales tradition, the girls commented afterwards that they don't usually get together to dance and have fun. They were school children, too busy and focused on their individual path. It's the world we live in. Isn't that a little bit sad?

So, while there is so much to say about this teaching of the Holy Trinity, I want to emphasize this one aspect today: God lives forever in community and he asks us and invites us to be in community with HIM (or whatever pronoun you want to use), and with each other. It's what our faith is about. It's what church is about. It's what life is about. And it is a reflection of God himself. Enjoy one another.

**Amen.**