



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 16, 2019
PROVERBS 8:1-4, 22-31; PSALM 8; ROMANS 5:1-5; JOHN 16:12-15

TRINITY SUNDAY

John 16:12-15 [*Jesus said to the 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*]

I am pleased to be with you at St. Mark's on this the most anticipated of Sundays on the liturgical calendar, Trinity Sunday. I am sure that after lying awake for nights on end wondering about the meaning and mystery of the Trinity you are looking forward to yet another attempt to explain once and for all the relationship between God, Jesus and the Spirit. Well the good news is that I have no intention of trying to explain the mystery of the Trinity. Trying to explain a mystery is sort of like explaining a joke. If you have to explain it, you probably have no business telling the joke. Mysteries aren't meant to be explained. Rather than a rational explanation of the Divine, we would be better served if we would allow ourselves to be caught up in the mystery in ways that reignited our

imagination and evoked a sense of awe, wonder and amazement.

Let's explore the mystery of the Trinity by exploring the mystery closest to us, namely our very selves. Beginning with the mystery of our own being will ground us so that the Trinity is not an abstract doctrine to be explained. Indeed, we are living inside the mystery of the Trinity. In today's Psalm the psalmist opens by extolling the wonders of God's creation: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses." The psalmist then considers the human in relation to God: "What are we that you should be mindful of us, mere mortals that you should seek us out? You have made us but little lower than the angels: you adorn us

with glory and honor; You give us mastery over the works of your hands; you put all things under our feet.”

This is quite an exalted view of the human, and perhaps we shouldn't be surprised because in the first chapter of Genesis we are told that “God created humankind in God's image.” That view, however, seems to be in tension with the notion of original sin that says we are inherently flawed. From early on Christian theologians interpreted the story of Adam and Eve through the lens of sin and shame, and we have been haunted and shaped by that reading for centuries. For what it's worth, that is not the way early Jewish community interpreted that story. Many of you are familiar with Brene Brown's work on shame. She defines shame as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection. She views shame as the source of destructive, hurtful behavior and believes that fear of connection can even make us dangerous.

Most of us have been impacted by people and experiences that have made us feel undeserving, inferior, or unworthy, and these memories have damaged our sense of self and hindered our capacity to connect to others. This sense of shame or unworthiness causes us to shrink and turn in on ourselves and withdraw from live-giving relationships. One of Luther's great insights, which came from his struggle with his own sense of

unworthiness, was that the very essence of sin is *en curvatus en se*, being curved in on oneself. And it is the ego curved in on itself that does damage to both self and others. Jesus summed up the whole of the Torah and the Prophets in the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Loving God and loving your neighbor are predicated on your capacity to love yourself.

In contrast to the notion of “original of sin”, Scripture seems to promote the idea of original blessing or goodness which serves to turn us toward God and neighbor and all that God created and deemed good. Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus himself says something remarkable in response to the charge of blasphemy for saying that he and God are one. Citing another Psalm he asks, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” To be sure, how you view yourself will greatly influence how you live in the world and how you relate to others. If you have a low or debased view of yourself, that will shape how you treat yourself and all living things. By the same token, if you believe in your heart of hearts that you were created in God's image you will be more likely to recognize the divine image in others and treat them accordingly.

So what does all this talk of sin and shame have to do with the Trinity? Only that the self that is shamed and turned in on itself is hindered from being in right relationship with God and neighbor, and if the Trinity

means anything, it means that God is relationship and that God is encountered primarily in relationship. The Trinity is not a theory about God, is a way of experiencing God in, with, and through relationship; through connection. It means that Divinity is fundamentally inside the world rather than outside of it. There is an episode in Acts where Paul is speaking to a crowd in Athens about how people search for God though indeed God is not far from each one of us, and then he quotes one of their poets who says for *'In God we live and move and have our being.'*

The verb that is used most frequently in the Gospel of John is the verb that is translated "abide", "dwell", or "remain." It is a verb of **being** that highlights our interdependence with the Divine and all living things. In the chapter just before the one from which we heard today, Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches to illustrate that we live inside the Trinitarian reality.

"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

Friends, you will never find anything in this world that exists self-sufficiently, by its own intrinsic nature, independent of all else. That is a fiction concocted by the ego, and it is the cause of great suffering inasmuch as it

encloses us within our own selves when in fact we were created from and for communion. We are constituted by community in that we have always existed in common. This is our birthright, and yet this foundational condition is jeopardized by the presumed absoluteness of the individual, of the ego.

Perhaps this is the "truth" of which Jesus speaks in today's Gospel reading when he says "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." For those who have eyes to see, the Spirit of truth is always moving among us to reveal our interdependence and indeed drawing people together to share life through the practice of mutual spiritual accompaniment. There was a wonderful article in the New York Times two Sundays ago about a project in the Bay Area called "*Nuns and Nones*" that moved religion-free millennials into a convent for six months. A diverse group of young adults who identified as "spiritual but not religious" and were brainstorming ways they could lead radical activist lives and exploring ways to live in intentional community. They realized that a group of people already doing this were nuns. "These are radical, badass women who have lived lives devoted to social justice," they said. "And we can learn from them."

These are challenging times for the sisters and millennials are the least religious group of people in America. The nuns were

surprised to learn at the first meeting that what the millennials wanted to talk about were their vows - poverty, obedience, chastity. The sisters began to see that the millennials wanted a road map for life and ritual, rather than a belief system. The millennials entered into a deeper relationship with the nuns and became a part of the community. And the nuns, well, as one sister put is “We just had so much in common to talk about.” She wrote a haiku about the millennials.

Eek. What will I say?

I'm too old for millennials.

Surprise, we're soul mates!

Sisters and the millennials wrote and read poems to each other. And they sang one of the sisters' chants: *Sacred is the Call.*

Awesome indeed the entrustment. Tending the Holy, tending the Holy.

I commend this story to you as an example of mutual spiritual accompaniment, of living inside the Trinitarian reality where we experience God in relationship as communion. This is the Divine dance that we are invited into; the therapy for being curved in on ourselves. The Greek term in the New Testament for this is ἔκστασις. It is the word from which we get “ecstasy” and it means to be taken outside of yourself. It is used to describe the women's experience when they realized that Jesus had been raised from the dead, “for trembling and ecstasy seized them” as they stood on the verge of a new reality to become a part of something larger than themselves. May the Spirit make it so! Blessed by the Holy Trinity!



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!