



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: TRINITY SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2024
ISAIAH 6:1-8; PSALM 29; ROMANS 8:12-17; JOHN 3:1-17

THE DIVINE DANCE OF LOVE

John 3:1-17 [There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born 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 is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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.”]

“To be here is to be held in a box. You move when they tell you to move. You eat when they tell you to eat – and what

you can eat. It’s being separated from everything you’ve known and loved.”

“It’s painful when you try to be real and all you’ve had in the past is rejection.”

“These women have never had the chance to tell their stories and have someone care or listen.”

“When you’re in prison, you don’t get to express the way you feel. Dance was a good way to express that.”ⁱ

These quotes come from incarcerated women in Washington state who have participated in “Keeping the Faith/The Prison Project,” an arts-based educational residency program designed to empower incarcerated women to discover a sense of identity and to develop that identity within the context of community. It was founded more than 30 years ago by Pat Graney, a local, well-known choreographer of modern dance and movement. It is one of our nation’s longest-running prison arts programs and it is still going strong and expanding internationally.

The residency functions as a workshop in autobiography, providing the women with tools for self-reflection and expression. The work is translated into movement and dance and performed to large crowds at the end of each program. Graney says the women, through the

sometimes-arduous process of exploring pain and making sense of it, are transformed. She says, “There’s something very powerful about being able to witness... another person's choice to be open rather than closed, another person's choice to write about difficult things and to be able to share that in front of an audience.”ⁱⁱ

In a short video, one of the participants says, “It’s a chance. Instead of being dead, I’m able to be a person. To make a future of my life.”

Another says, “We might be recovering drug addicts and convicts, but we are still people with feelings. Give us half a chance and look at what we can do.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Today is Trinity Sunday, a feast that celebrates our orthodox Christian belief that God is one Divine essence that has been revealed as three persons who are unique and defined by their relationships with one another. Early church theologians used the term *perichoresis* to get at this Mystery. Most precisely, *perichoresis* describes the mutual indwelling or interpenetration of the Divine Persons in the Godhead. Each

person gives completely and eternally to the other and the other persons receive completely and give back. This eternal self-giving love among three persons is dynamic. In this sense, perichoresis means a cyclical movement, reciprocity, and interpenetration. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit not only embrace one another, they also permeate, contain, and exist in one another. They move into each other and belong to each other. This is a living God, a community of persons bound by love.

And what is the true nature of love? Remember what it feels like to fall in love? It is exhilarating. You can't keep it to yourself. The experience permeates all aspects of your life. Its energy overflows from your being. How much more so with divine love? It's a love that gives itself away. It is generative and brings forth new life. God in God-Self was complete and full in Eternity. There was nothing lacking in God. But, in freedom, and out of love, God chose to create so that God could love something other than God-Self. Divine love is self-emptying, it is generative, it is fecund. The divine love could not be contained

within the Godhead. God chose to create. We are God's creatures born out of freedom and love. God's love could not be contained. This is how we can say that God IS love.

This is why later theologians started using a Greek verb similar to perichoresis to describe the Trinity's relationship with creation. They found a verb that had one additional letter. The word, *perichoreuo* means *to dance around*. Yes, that's where we get the English word *choreography* and why Richard Rohr wrote a book on the Trinity called *The Divine Dance*.^{iv}

God invites us, and all creation, into the divine dance of love. We are invited into the very life of God. Being a disciple of Jesus means recognizing him as the most perfect image and expression of God's eternal love. We are called to invite others into perichoresis, the divine dance, with the One who loved us into existence. We serve a God who is revealed as relationship, we have been created as a community bound together in love. In freedom and love, we exist in relationship with God, our deepest selves, one

another, and the community of all God's creatures.

The Trinity is not just some esoteric and speculative theological theory. It is the very pattern of our existence. God freely chose to create each of us in love. We belong to one another and are interconnected to all of God's creation. By sharing our stories and connecting through empathy, we experience our own version of mutual indwelling, reciprocity, and interpenetration. This is our perichoresis. We belong to one another, and we are not alone.

Let me circle back to Pat Graney and her prison dance program. She says,

“At the end of the program, you see this openness that is really a circular, communal sensibility. The women go there because they have a courage that comes from communicating their story and being known by others in love.”^v

On this feast of the Holy Trinity, it is revealed that God is relationship, God is community of persons in love. The divine dance is an invitation to Communion. Communion. Isn't that what we are about to do?^{vi}

ⁱ These quotes came from the videos found here [Performance Videos | Pat Graney Company](#).

ⁱⁱ From the video embedded in this article <https://crosscut.com/2017/10/pat-graney-prison-arts-dance-choreography-seattle-washington-state>.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Performance Videos | Pat Graney Company](#).

^{iv} *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and your transformation*, Richard Rohr, SPCK, 2016.

^v From the video embedded in this article <https://crosscut.com/2017/10/pat-graney-prison-arts-dance-choreography-seattle-washington-state>.

^{vi} *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. John D. Zizioulas. New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press and London, Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1985.