

Living the Trinity
Acts 2:37 – 47; 1 Corinthians 12:12 – 27
Sunday, June 16, 2019 (Trinity Sunday)

We have a *lot* going on today. Commissioning the mission trip that leaves for Puerto Rico on Saturday. Celebrating our high school and college graduates. Recognizing our Sunday School teachers. And there was some talk several weeks ago about, “Should we split these up and move some of them to a different date so that there’s not *so much* going on today?” But I really wanted to keep it all on this day. These are all reflections of our life together as the church; our commitment to one another, to sharing life together and supporting one another. Today is Trinity Sunday, the day on the church calendar when we reflect on God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and what that means for us. And all of these things that we are doing today – *that* is the Trinity.

The Trinity is not just a *theological idea*. It’s a *way of life*. It’s not just something to be *studied* or *understood*. It is something to be *embodied* and *lived*. The Trinity is the relationship between *three distinct persons* (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and yet at the same time those three distinct persons are *one*, living together in mutual love. The *very nature of God* is one of *community* – three living together as one. And this is what the Trinity shows us about *ourselves* – that being created in the very image of the triune God, *our* nature is found in community. We were *created* for *community*, to live life *together*, as *one*, in mutual love.

We see this at the very beginning of creation, when God looks at Adam and says, “It is *not good* that the man should be alone. I will make him a partner.” We were not created to go through life by ourselves. We were created to share life with other people in community.

We see this embodied by the early church in our reading from Acts. It says that when the church first started out, all who believed were together and had all things in common. This is not like we say, “Oh, we’ve got a lot in common; we like the same TV shows and sports teams,” but that they *shared* everything they had. Whatever they had was for the common use. It says they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God together.

They shared their *food*. They shared their *money*. They shared their *time*. They lived life *together*. This wasn’t just a Sunday thing for them. They *depended* on each other. They *opened their lives up* to one another. They were *inherently connected* to each other. Their lives were *bound* together. What affected *one* of them affected *all* of them. They were *many*, living together as *one*.

That is a reflection of the very nature of God – three living together as one in mutual love, distinct and yet inseparable from one another, their lives intertwined with each other. And that is what Paul is picking up on in his letter to the Christians in Corinth. He says we each have different gifts. Different ways in which we are called to live out our faith and serve God. Some people preach. Some people teach. Some people cook so that other people have food to eat. Some people work really well with kids, while others are like, “That’s not *my* gift!” Some people work well with their *hands*, and they can *build* things, while other people are like, “I don’t know *how* they do *that*!” We each have these different gifts, *but*, Paul says, they are given to us by the *same Spirit*, for the *common good*. Whatever my gift is, it’s not just for *me*. It’s for *all of us*. *My life* is *not just for me*, it is meant to be *shared* and lived in *harmony* with *your* life.

This is what the church is meant to be. A community of people whose *lives* are *bound together*. Inherently connected. Living life together. Sharing our gifts, sharing our *lives* with each other. Laughing together, crying together, praying together. Many distinct people, living together as *one*. The Greek word for *church* is *ekklesia*, which means, “Those who have been called out.” We have been called out of our individual lives, to live a *new life, together*, in Christ.

We are called not just to *go* to church, but to *be* the church. To open ourselves up and let each other in and *share life together*. Share our hopes and our joys. Share our fears and our failures. When one of us does well, Paul says, we *all* do well. When one of us hurts, we *all* hurt. We are called to be as connected to each other as the Father is to the Son and the Spirit is to the Father and the Son is to the Spirit.

And *that* can be a very hard thing to do. Because when you open yourself up to someone else and live life together like that, things can get *messy*. It’s a *risk* anytime we let other people into our lives; let them see our wounds and imperfections and mistakes. We risk being hurt or rejected. There is a poet named Mark Jarman who wrote a poem that plays off of the rhyme where children put their hands together and say, “This is the church, and this is the steeple, open it up, and there’s all the people.” Jarman writes:

Among them you can hear their half-choked cries
To be released, to be pried from this mess
They’re soldered into somehow – they don’t know.
But stuck now they are willing to confess,
If that will ease your grip and let them go,
Confess the terror they cannot withstand
Is being locked inside another hand.¹

It can be *terrifying* to be this *bound* to other people; for *our* hands to be locked in the hand of another. It can feel very *vulnerable* and out of our control. And maybe that’s the point. That it

¹ <https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/1993/4/unholy-sonnets>

is out of our control. That in our life together, we are being called to trust not just *each other*, but we are being called to trust *God* together.

This past week we had a Session meeting (a meeting of the Elders of the church) to decide on a path forward with Ridgley. After three months of medical leave, we had several options that we had to look at – from her coming back full-time, working mostly off-site, knowing that there were some things she wasn't going to be able to do for a while, like be here on Sundays; to her coming back part-time and what would *that* look like; to even saying, “There are just too many obstacles here, this is too hard. It's time to just end our ministry together and move on.” There were a lot of questions about how this was all going to work; *whether* it could even work; all the logistics of time and money.

We talked for *three hours* about all of these options. There were 13 people around the table, all of whom had very strong feelings about this and very different *ideas* about how we should move forward. At one point I took a straw poll just to see where everyone was and if we could begin to narrow down our discussion, and they were *evenly split* among the three options. I had *no idea* where this was going to end up!

But there was a point in the meeting where one of the Elders said, “When you're in relationship with someone, there are going to be hard times. There are going to be challenges and bumps in the road. But when those come, you don't just give up on that person and end the relationship. You love each other and you support each other and you work through it and you do what you can to *fix* it, even though it's not easy. When Ridgley first came here two years ago, we all had such a strong sense of God's call in this process; that this was God's will for our church. And so even though it is not going to be easy, and it probably doesn't make sense, I think we have to

trust God, that if this is God's will for our church, then God is going to make it work. And we need to do everything *we* can do to make it work.”

And as the meeting went on, some other Elders started saying, “You know, I had been thinking *this way*, but I hear what you're saying, and I think you're right. I think we should take a step here and trust God.” And that's what they did. They voted to bring her back full time, working remotely for the first six months, and then slowly starting to work in the building again over the course of another six months, and saying, “We know this isn't going to be *easy*, but this is how we feel God is calling us to live life together.” That is a reflection of the Trinity.

And I can't even tell you, as your pastor, how *proud* I am of our Elders (and how proud *you* should be). There was no “right answer” here. This wasn't like a multiple-choice test where you look at all of these options and just have to figure out which one is *correct*. Any one of them could have been right, and any one of them could have been wrong. But what matters in a situation like that isn't that they found the right decision, but that they *decided rightly*. And they decided *righteously*. They *sang* together, and they *prayed* together, and they *listened* to one another and *trusted* one another and *loved* one another. They truly sought to discern God's will together. And *that* is what makes for a good decision.

When I talked to one of the Elders the next day, they said to me, “It felt *so good* to sit around that table and share our deepest thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears and be vulnerable with each other and know that I was not being *judged* or *dismissed*, but that I was being *heard* and *valued* and *accepted*, and that we could trust each other enough to do that.”

That is a reflection of the Trinity. And that is what we are *all* called to do together as Christ's church – to live life together in love, even in the midst of our differences. It is not *easy*. It is *hard*, and it can be *messy*, and there is *risk* involved with *trusting* each other and being *vulnerable* with each other like that. But that is what it looks like to *be* the Church and *live* the Trinity. Distinct persons living together as one, our individual lives so bound together that they cannot be separated. It's not always neat or easy, and it doesn't always make sense. But it's who *God is*, and we were created in the very *image* of this Triune God, so it's who *we are*, too.