

Reentering the Divine Dance
John 17:11, 20–23; Acts 2:37–47
Sunday, May 30, 2021

Today is Trinity Sunday, the day on which we celebrate God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We just completed the season of Easter in which we celebrate the resurrected Son of God, Jesus Christ. And last Sunday we celebrated Pentecost and the coming of God's Holy Spirit. This Sunday we bring all of that together and talk about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the church was first starting out, people accused Christians of being polytheistic, worshipping multiple gods. They would say, "You talk about God the Father, but then you also worship Jesus Christ who you say is God, but you also talk about him as the *Son* of God, so which one is he? And then you say that the Holy Spirit is God's presence with you now." It was very confusing for people. Over the centuries, as the church clarified its beliefs, they started talking about *one God* revealed in *three persons*. And they referred to this as the Trinity. God has been revealed to us in the Father, who created heaven and earth. God has been revealed to us in the Son, who redeemed humanity. And God has been revealed to us in the Holy Spirit, who sustains humanity. These aren't three separate gods. This is *one God* existing eternally in *three persons*.

Now, here's the tricky part (if that's not already tricky enough!). The Bible does not set forth a *doctrine* or an *explanation* or even a specific *teaching* about the Trinity. In fact, the Bible does not even *mention* the word *Trinity*. The Bible makes reference to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, sometimes together, sometimes separately. But it *doesn't* say, "Here's how all that *works*. Here's how we *understand* the Triune God." The Trinity is something that our understanding of it took shape in the first few centuries after Jesus. Theologians and church leaders started looking at the relationship between the God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and trying to make sense out of how one God could exist in three persons. And so our understanding of the Trinity is drawn from the *relationship* between the Father and the Son and the Spirit.

The Trinity is *relational*. It is found in the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit – three distinct persons existing as one. And we see that alluded to in our scripture readings today. In Jesus’ prayer where he is saying to God, “I am coming to you,” and, “You have sent me,” suggesting that Jesus and God are to a certain degree *separate*, while at the same time praying, “You are in me, and I am in you...We are *one*,” emphasizing their *oneness*. Jesus asks God to make his *followers* one, just as he and God are one.

And then in our reading from Acts, we see that oneness at work among Jesus’ followers. These men and women who are from different places with different backgrounds – they are different *people* – and yet they are living life together: eating together, praying together, learning together, worshipping together, selling their possessions and sharing the money with each other, holding all things in common. They are distinct, individual people, and yet they are *one*. The Trinity is reflected in their very life together, the relationship between these distinct people living life as one.

And so for *us*, our life together is to reflect the very life of God, the very *nature* of God: many living together as one. And here’s where this begins to speak to us, because for the past year, we have *not* been living life together as one. Maybe in a *spiritual* sense – which I don’t want to discount, and even *that* has been difficult – but not so much in a *physical* sense. We have been *separated* from one another, not just in the church, but in society as a whole.

We are beginning to *emerge* from that now, but what I have found is that, for a lot of people, it is *not that easy*. We are happy and excited to get back to some sense of normalcy, but I have had a lot of conversations over the past few weeks where people are saying, “I don’t know how to *do*

that yet.” We have spent the past year staying home and wearing masks and keeping distance, doing what we needed to do to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe and healthy. And after getting into that rhythm of life so intensely, after getting used to that as our new normal, it has been really hard for some people to just take their mask off and trust that it’s going to be okay. That may not be you, and if not, that’s great. But I can promise you, after having enough of these conversations, there are friends and neighbors and family members and church members who *are* struggling with this, this question of, “How do we emerge from this pandemic back into life together?”

That’s what we’re going to talk about today – less about the doctrine of the Trinity than about how that relational understanding of God is lived out in us. We’re going to look at, if you *are* struggling with reentry to life together, how can you *do* that, and if you’re *not* struggling with it, if you’re ready to go, how can we love those people who *are* struggling? Theologians often describe the Trinity as the love that binds the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. So how can *we* go back to life together in a spirit of Triune love?

And the first thing that I want to suggest is *patience*. We have talked a lot over the past month about Jesus’ call to abide in him by abiding in his love, and we have talked about what that *means* to abide in his love, to love one another the way he loves us. We have looked at Paul’s words to the Corinthians where the first thing he says about love is that it is *patient*. Love is found in the ways that we practice patience with one another, and with *ourselves*.

So that’s where we start – resuming our life together in a spirit of Triune love is going to take patience. If you are having a hard time with that idea of taking off your mask and reentering, have patience with yourself. If you are ready to go but find that people around you are *not*, have

patience with them. It's been a hard year, and we all need a little bit of grace. This might not happen as quickly as you want it to. It might take time. And we actually *see* that reflected in our reading from Acts today. On that first day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, it says that about 3,000 people were baptized and joined their life together. That's *a lot*. Can you imagine the whiplash that those original disciples must have felt when all of a sudden they had to get used to *thousands* of new people and this whole new life together? I would bet it felt something like the other week when the CDC said, "If you're vaccinated, you can take off your mask now." Some people received that with great joy, while others had a feeling of, "Whoa! That's a lot really fast!"

But after that initial whiplash on Pentecost, it talks about how they lived their life together through simple practices: eating, praying, worshipping. And it says, "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." *Day by day*. It didn't *all* happen on that first day. It happened little by little, day by day, as they spent time together.

In that same way, we can give ourselves and each other permission for this to take time. We can give ourselves and each other patience and understanding and grace. Because as Paul also says, "Love is not irritable or resentful. It doesn't insist on its own way. It bears all things and endures all things." We can lovingly resume our life together day by day.

Now, one of the things it says about *their* day-by-day life together in Acts is that they spent much time together. If you are struggling with reentry, one of the ways you can take a step toward resuming life together is by finding small, simple ways to spend time with people. Have

a friend over to eat lunch outside. Then maybe the next time you meet a friend for lunch at an outdoor restaurant. Then maybe the next time you have a friend over to eat lunch *inside*. Step by step, day by day, find ways to ease yourself back into this. And again, some of us may be *fine* with jumping right back into things. So the question for us is, “How can we patiently love those who are *not*?” By *being* that safe person they can have lunch with. Or go for a walk with. Or just saying to them, “I am comfortable doing this however you want to do it.” Because love doesn’t insist on its own way.

Come to an outdoor worship service with your mask on. Then maybe come with it *off*. The point is getting used to being around people again in a way that maybe we *haven’t* been in a year.

The past few weeks we’ve been dancing together in the parking lot after worship. I want to show you something real quick. (SHOW VIDEO OF DANCING) So first, I’ll apologize to anyone who was unknowingly front and center in that. But you could see that some people were wearing masks, and some were not. We were spaced apart, but we were *together*. It was a very simple way of resuming our life together. And it was actually very *trinitarian*.

When the early church first started talking about the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they talked about it using the Greek word *perichoresis*. The word *peri* means *around*, and the word *choresis* means *to dance*, like *choreography*. They talked about the Trinity in terms of *dancing around*. When you watch that video of us dancing, you see that we are all doing the same dance, but we’re doing it in slightly different ways. We are distinct individuals engaged in the same dance together. The early Christians talked about the Father, Son, and Spirit engaged in a divine dance, where they were all dancing *together*, but maybe doing it in

different ways. The Father's dance was different than the Son's, which was different than the Spirit's, but they were all *dancing*.

As we resume our life together, we might not all go about it the same way. Some might remain masked, some might not. But the point is that we're taking steps together.

All of this – our patience, our small day-by-day steps – are grounded in *trust*. Primarily, trust in *God*. Jesus was able to do everything he did because he trusted completely in God's presence with him and love for him. His followers were able to do everything *they* did because they trusted in God. And Jesus prays here in our reading from John, "Protect them that you have given me." We are called to *trust* that God is *with us* through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that God is watching over us, protecting us, seeing us through the challenges of life.

I found that, early on in *my* reentry, if I would do something that had been outside of my comfort zone for the past year, I would have to remind myself, "No, you're vaccinated. This is okay." I had to remind myself to trust. And so if you're struggling with reentry, maybe you start by reminding yourself to trust. Maybe it's, "I'm vaccinated. This is okay." Maybe it's reminding yourself, "God is with me, watching over me, protecting me." If you're *not* struggling with it, maybe you can be that person that someone who *is* struggling can trust. By being patient and understanding with them, by respecting where they are, walking with them through their anxiety and concerns.

Our life together is grounded in the Trinity. The Trinity is grounded in love. Love is grounded in trust. And trust is grounded in knowing that this person – whether it's God or someone else – is *with* you and *for* you. Through the Holy Spirit, we see that God is *with* us today. And through

the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we see that God is *for* us. Let us be *with* and *for* each other, in patient love, so that day by day, we might be *one*, with God and with each other.