

St James United Church



Message for May 26, 2024 Trinity Sunday

“In Divine Community” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Is 6:1-8; Jn 3:1-17; M. Hewitt Suchocki, *God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* 222-23

Today we mark Trinity Sunday, a day known as an idea feast, that is a day that commemorates not an event, like we did with Pentecost last week as we recalled how the followers of Jesus first experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but instead a theological concept. Now in some sense every Sunday is an idea feast because as much we consider biblical stories, we also ponder their meaning for us. But that’s not the case today. In its origin, this Sunday is one hundred percent idea based. And of all the ideas to ponder, the idea of God being three persons and yet still one God is an absolute stumper.

But it is only a stumper when we try to explain it. The formulations about the Trinity developed in the 4th and 5th centuries of the Common Era were an attempt to do just that, the bishops and other leaders using philosophical words like *homoousios* (meaning of the same essence) to explain what in the end is a felt experience of God as beyond us yet close, powerful, continually creating, yet personal, experienced in Jesus as God’s wisdom, wholly other but dwelling with us, empowering us, as Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki suggests, God near us with love, God present in trust, God always bringing us hope.

Those words are relational in tone, and ultimately that’s what early church leaders were trying to articulate. But the one we call God can’t be articulated. We get into trouble because we think of God in our terms, as a being and so as a noun, but God is better pondered as being itself and so as a verb. To speak of God as three-in-one is a way to express that God is forever in relationship within Godself, and in relationship with the cosmos, including us, a relationship profoundly embodied in Jesus and continues to animate us through the Spirit, drawing us up into that relationship like a fourth person as I shared earlier in our Learning Together time.

This relationality is at the heart of the reading from John. Nicodemus comes to see Jesus, affirms that Jesus must have come from God because otherwise he couldn’t do what he does. Jesus confirms as much when he says that no one can experience God’s Realm unless they’re born from above, a gift made possible through the Spirit. Jesus has very much experienced this reality, the presence and power of God. After all, God’s Realm is the core of his teaching,

the centre of all that he does. But Jesus makes clear that this experience of God's wisdom is not just for him but for all of us, that God's nature is love not judgement, a teaching he came to reveal, and not just as applied to God but for each other too.

And to underscore that this is for all of us, Jesus breaks the fourth wall, no longer speaking just to Nicodemus but speaking to a plural you, to all of us. This relationship within God through the Spirit is something that Jesus embodied; and it is a gift he wants us to share with him. And this has always been the case, God breathing in us from the first moments of creation, animating us from our first wailing cry. But we resist this blessing, either thinking we can go it alone, the source of so much trouble in our world, or seeing ourselves as not worthy, like Isaiah in the Temple, overwhelmed by God's presence and so crying out how he is sinful. Either way, we are caught by our egos. They get in the way, and we hurt others, but never to the point that we are not loveable. God is forever reaching out to us to lift that burden from our hearts, calling us to be in relationship and commissioning us to share the same with others.

Like I said, God is a verb more than a noun and is discovered in three fundamentally relational ways: God present as we turn within to the quiet of our hearts to pray, to reflect, to listen to the love at our centre; God found when we speak to each other, support one another, make peace with others, emerging more and more as we seek hope over despair, connection over isolation, love over hate; God discovered around us as we stop in wonder at the more than just human in our world, all of life, every aspect of creation relating to every other aspect. This is what the teaching on Trinity is trying to articulate. When we let ourselves sink into this reality of loving relationship at the heart of all things, then that love flows through us, makes it possible for us to love everyone and everything.

But in the end, this really needs to be experienced more than spoken about, so I want to end my speaking with us pausing to do just that, to sit in quiet meditative silence, focused on our breath. As you breath, release each thought as it comes. Focus on the moment, aware of that holy love and grace we call God that is within us, aware too of the same holy love and grace that is present between us in community, is beyond these walls and ever present in our world. Let's take a few minutes, to not think about God but to rest in God.

Pause for 2 minutes of silent prayer.

Amen.