

W Thomas – First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday – June 12, 2022

O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer, may the words in my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. For God invites us to live and love like Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, help others to do the same. Amen.

I begin this homily, this sermon, invoking the Trinity. God invites us to live and love like Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it's appropriate because it reminds us that we are called to be disciples, followers who live and love like Jesus. But this is a Sunday called Trinity Sunday.

It's a Sunday during the year we decide to take a discourse into doctrine and perhaps dogma, and if we're not careful, we can put everybody into a deep coma trying to parse the whole mystery. So let me kind of, y'all, people at home, this church is filled this morning with about 40 or 50 adults and incredibly gifted teens who are on their way to do God's handiwork at Glory Ridge. They're out to do service work with, the graphic on the t-shirt has tools, so you're going to be doing hands-on ministry.

And so perhaps, since it's Trinity Sunday, you might consider taking, riding on the bus, you can use your phones, go into the note-taking feature, and deal with this, maybe 500 words on how you understand this short statement that was in our prayer. Almighty and everlasting God, who has given unto us the servant's grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, in the power of the divine majesty, to the worship of the unity. Can you do that for me? Hang on.

When I was in seminary, like so many, far too many years ago, we actually had to try to write something called that. I'm not sure how well I did that. I'm still working on it.

This is something that is so immense to try to understand. We never quite find out the right images, but when we get a glimpse or a brief sense of it, it draws us in closer to what it is to have this love given to us that we have found in Jesus Christ. Let me do a visual quick test.

I've done this before in the last few years with youth. They run right to their phones and pop up graphics. I think that's cool.

Do you know what a FedEx truck looks like? It drives by and you see the word FedEx on it. Anybody know what it looks like between the E and the X? Do you see a shape in there? An arrow. That's exactly right.

If you've never seen the arrow in the FedEx logo, you will always see it from now on because you've noticed it. I have another little test that I do. I could have brought the game with me, but it's basically a reverse space test.

It's a bunch of lines, and you look at it, and you look at it, and you look at it, and all of a sudden, the word appears on the inside, and you see Jesus. Every time you look at that graphic again, much like the FedEx truck, you will always see the word Jesus. I use that as an example of, now that's how you see the world.

Once you see the world through a certain lens, frame of understanding or whatever, you will always respond to the world that way. Part of your going on a mission trip, part of the work of the church is to respond, to have a relationship with this incredible, huge love that makes it possible for us to even want to get on a bus, to go do God's handiwork, to go to Glory Ridge, or to go to feed people who are hungry, or you can make the list of the things that we can do to make thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. The Trinity is another opportunity for us to enter into the divine mystery.

There's nothing really in Scripture that says, and then there is a Trinity, and you might, it's sort of like you've got to figure it out yourself, but once you've figured it out, or you get a small appreciation for it, it begins to make a lot of sense. But if we keep it into the realm of 500 to 1,000 to 2,000 word essays, it loses its power. I'm pretty much a visual person.

I like to tell stories. I like to remember things, like the FedEx logo, the reverse Jesus that pops out. When you are at Glory Ridge, I don't think there's a lake there, is there? It's too bad there's not a big lake.

So when you get to a place with a big, big, big lake, I hope you have a similar experience as I did at the Boy Scout camp when I was the chaplain in the, gosh, do I say the late 90s? I don't. Anyway, I was standing there waiting for everybody to show up, and this big, huge, I mean, it's a lake. The water goes on forever.

And I was just kind of killing time. And I had some stones in my hand, and I took one. I went, pew! And I threw it up in the air.

And the water bounces back up. And you know what happens when the water bounces back up? You know, ripples? The water starts to go out. I said, that's kind of cool.

Then I thought, hmm, I threw another one, but I threw it slightly to the left. Pow! Bing! Now, the first one was still rippling, but the second one really bounced up. And I went, oh, I think I'm onto something.

And I took another stone. Remember, I'm working on threes here. Trinity is like three.

And I threw the stone way up in the air. Down to the right. Bing! Let's make a triangle.

The first one had pretty well dissipated. The second one was still rippling. The third one bounced back up.

And I went, oh, my goodness. I had just imagined for me something that works. A small entrance into.

That in the water, which is the immensity of God, the immensity of God's love, as far as my small mind can handle, I saw something that drew me into it more deeply. And I began to understand relationship. I saw Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier.

Or as I believe I introduced here once, I said about Ilia Delio Franciscan, theologian, I said, my gosh, Lover, Beloved, Breath of Love. So the thing about Trinity is it helps us understand perfect relationship in a way that we can understand it. Because when we try to write it

down, it doesn't make a lot of sense unless you really go so deep into it, you can't make much sense about it.

So I'm sitting here thinking, okay, it's another Trinity Sunday. I get to preach on the Trinity. I love my image about the water.

Is there anything new God can teach me? By the way, be careful when you ask God, is there anything new you can teach me? Because God usually does. And sometimes it's not something you want to know, but you really need to. I've had this rope hanging in my study for the longest time.

At that same camp a couple of years later, I was going through some training called Wood Badge for Boy Scout leaders. And one of the things that we had to do was take a rope and make it so that this part could go here. You see the little T on the top? That way if a bunch of people are together and they share their rope, they have a long rope if they need to climb up something, can wrap around your legs.

I'd love to let you think that I did the weaving part here. I really needed an old-school person to show me and do it. But in looking at the rope as it hung in my study, I realized something that goes hand-in-hand with what it is for us to be a people who try to stay away from heavy-duty doctrine.

That means having so many rules it makes us crazy about how to figure things out. You've heard the term, if you've been hanging around the Episcopal Church long enough, the Middle Way or the Anglican Way, where we try to find a way to have the middle ground between the tension of order and prophecy. We try to find a way to figure out how things ought to work.

And in that we say, what are the things that guide us in coming up with ideas and figuring out how to make it work? How to have our rules just enough rules? And so we came up with the idea, well, let's have a stool. Have you seen a three-legged stool? You take one leg away, you fall. And on the stool they'd have scripture as authoritative, our brains, reason as authoritative, and then finally experience, or how we've lived, reason, scripture and tradition, how we've lived it out.

I always found that to be a bit of a weak explanation. I think scripture is at the heart of God calling to us. But I don't want it to so overwhelm how I've received God.

You're going to experience that in your work in ways that you're going to come back and do new reflections. Things are going to happen that God is going to invite you to see. Hopefully you will see them.

Not unlike throwing the rock up into the water. I looked at this, and I've looked at Rope before, and this has got three strands in it. Weaving it to make it strong and tight.

I can't tell which strand is which once it gets going. But I like to imagine that the first strand that goes in here is scripture. And the second strand that goes in here is tradition.

And the third strand that goes in here is reason, our ability to think. And when they're so tightly together, we need them all, and they make them stronger. And I bring this to you.

Did you notice I was working with three again? Lover, beloved, breath of love. Perfect. Now, I've sort of been able to make this work a little bit.

I can't make this thing do like a carnival guy. I put my foot up here, maybe I can make a triangle. I've got a graphic that I'll post with the sermon where the Celts are able to make the rope come out in such a way that it's got three circles on it and it never ends to talk about what it is to be in perfect unity, perfect relationship.

Or one of the harder images to try to figure this out with is what's it like for a threesome to dance so perfectly you never think of them as a threesome, but as a one-so? And that's what it is for God's love. That's what Trinity is. That's how I've gotten to try to understand it now because it's calling me to try to live in this same kind of relationship with God's people.

And I don't have God's patience, so I have to pray to God a lot. And I'm really grateful for when I get my glimpses, such as you all sitting here, you sitting there, get my glimpses of how God's people are responding to God's invitation to care for God's world. And that's at the heart of what it means to have Trinity.

I see the world through this sense of relationship and how can I have this perfect relationship? And I see this understanding of, my gosh, it's all here because we were loved more than we could ask or imagine. That's God as lover. The beloved is Jesus, coming and showing us the way.

And then the breath of love, which is given to us, if you think about it, when Thomas and the apostles receive it in the gospel according to John, Ruah, pneuma, the breath of God, it's been blown on you, found in you, being asked to share it with others. I'll also leave you with one last thing. I learned this prayer here.

Now, it's the one I open worship with. It's in the prayer book, prayer of self-dedication. I can't begin to tell you how important that has become for me.

It was hiding here all along. When it comes time for your commission, going out to share this good news, I'm going to have you repeat that back to me. So I want you to hear it one more time in the context of how I've been inviting you into entering into the breath of love, being the lover, acting on God's love and finding a way to share the good news of the beloved.

So it goes like this. And try to hear it against the work you're called to do. Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you.

And I will add, at glory reach. And then use us, we pray, at glory reach. As you will.

And always to your glory and the welfare of your people. All these words I offer in the name of God. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Redeemer, Creator, Sanctifier, Lover, Beloved, Breath of Love.

Amen.