

Gen. 1: 1-2; 4a  
2 Cor. 13: 11 – 13  
Matthew 28: 16 – 20  
Trinity Sunday, Yr. A.

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### **“One and Same Are Not”**

Some of you may remember Bob Newhart before he became a TV star. Some of you may even remember one of his routines from his stand-up comedian days when he channeled Abe Lincoln talking with a political consultant about ways to “punch up” the Gettysburg Address. Mostly the consultant (and I apologize in advance if anyone here today is now or ever has been a political consultant), tries to convince Abe that his speech is far too ethereal, far too conciliatory, far too complex for the average sort to understand, and, worse yet, far too short a speech to make an impact. So much for political consultants. But that routine came to mind because I envisioned the church leaders, wrangling over theology at the Council of Nicaea, turning to a political consultant, or perhaps a church growth consultant, on the likely impact of their decisions. I can easily imagine someone concerned about making Christianity easily understood and acceptable wailing over the decision to create a Trinitarian theology out of a monotheistic historic tradition. What were they thinking? Just being advocates of a monotheistic religion put them at some distance from the run-of-the-mill religions of the day. Moreover, this one God was intolerant of worshipping lesser gods and demanded total attention. Well, there was some precedence for this and the notion of my god being bigger, badder, better, than your god had some traction in the ancient world. One God has a nice ring to it and it settles lots of pesky questions.

But then there is Jesus Christ. What of him who lived, died, was resurrected from the dead, and ascended into heaven? We could have said he was an extremely ethical, deeply wise, highly evolved human being – sort of an early Alan Alda type of SNAG – sensitive new age guy. We could have placed him in the pantheon of great prophets and sages of the world right up there with Moses and Isaiah and Daniel and Mohammed and Confucius and Buddha and Zoroaster and others. But no, the Council argued that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine and no, he was not a split personality, either, thank you very much. Father and Son were co-creators and both were present before there was anything else and both are eternal and both are One.

But then there is the Holy Spirit. When did it crowd into the picture and why is it that we cannot make up our minds about whether it is a woman, a bird, a wind, a flame, or a ghost? Would it have been so hard to work all this out in private and then simply announce to the world that we have a third aspect of the God-head and we all now agree that it is “X?” But no, all that time they spent arguing, all the riots in the streets by the supporters of this view and that view, and they ended up punting on the whole issue. I suspect that they were all behind on their room rent and the merchants were sick and tired of free-loading clergy, so they had to hurry up and accept a patched-up compromise leaving history with this murky figure called the Holy “Somethingorother.” It is not surprising that, like many a bureaucracy, the church ended up defining Trinitarianism by

what it was not rather than what it was. That is, the church leaders simply declared some beliefs as heresies but were reluctant to actually get pinned down on what they really meant.

So, thousands of years later and here we are trying to explain this curious insistence on One God in Three Persons – the Holy Trinity. Even the church itself was not certain what to do liturgically with this theological statement since we celebrate the Trinity every Sunday. Thomas Becket appears to be the first major church leader to create a feast day for this theology in 1162 and it was made universal by Pope John 22<sup>nd</sup> in 1334. It is likely that it occurs after Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost because, with the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles last week, we now have a complete display of Father, Son, and Holy Whatever.

But what are we to make of this odd, challenging, and counter-intuitive theology? Put differently, why would we make this religion so hard to get all of our heads around? If we really wanted to preach the Good News to all nations, if we really wanted to become a mega-church, could we not make the message simpler and easier for everyone? Certainly, no clever human being would saddle a religion with such a complex concept. But then, this message is not from human beings, clever or otherwise; this message is from God.

One and same are not equal. One-ness is not defined as requiring same-ness. Our one world is vastly different. Our one eco-system is composed of many wildly different elements and organisms. Our one universe is composed, pardon me Carl Sagan, of billions and billions and billions of stars, to borrow a phrase. Our one species is composed of billions of people, with, on the one hand, only a few differences among them, but oh those differences. Indeed, what we are learning is that one-ness requires divergence. Unity cannot exist where there is not variance. When we try to eradicate difference, we unbalance God's creation and we create chaos and disorder out of our mistaken notions that same-ness and one-ness are equal concepts. The fundamental unity that we intuitively understand as essential for all of creation draws its very life force from the teeming abundance of diverse forms and expressions of God's abundant love.

The very nature of a gift is its distinctiveness. If we all possessed exactly the same gift, it would be no gift at all. God adores creation; God created out of love, and God has given an astonishing range of gifts to adorn, to amuse, to entertain, to educate, and to enchant all of life. God is not parsimonious, God's elegance does not reside in minimalism and reduction. God's love is abundant, profligate, wildly overdone. This God made Leviathan for the sport of it. This God made duck-billed platypi and hippopotami, and created life in places almost unimaginable. This God made a cosmos that is expanding faster and faster all the time.

One and same are not equal. And we are called as Christians to open our arms, open our minds, and open our hearts to everyone. The true heresy, the true blasphemy is for us to exclude or deny or oppress or hate because others are not the same as we are. When we push for sameness, thinking it will be easier and safer and far more comforting, we lead

to inherent instability and eventual chaos. It is in celebrating and raising up those wondrous differences that make creation so engaging, so beautiful, so adaptable, so renewable that, as we celebrate and delight in difference, we come closest to knowing the unity of God. So, in identifying and fostering and sharing openly the gifts we have been given, we seemingly are heightening our independence and our difference; for in pursuing our own journeys, our own call, and our own needs, it might seem that we are working against the unity of all creation. By no means, we are, in fact, making our own small contribution to the unity of creation, maintaining the larger unity of the world, adding those small seemingly meaningless little gifts that turn out to be essential parts of larger whole. It turns out that creation does not need much of some gifts, but without those gifts, all of creation would falter.

We still may not be certain about this Trinitarian theology and our imagery of the Holy Spirit may wander a bit from culture to culture and person to person. Preaching about the Trinity may still be an uphill battle. But, if nothing else, when we see the Holy Trinity mentioned, when we view icons and images of the Holy Trinity, when we invoke a Trinitarian blessing or prayer, let us smile quietly and remember that One and the Same are not.

Amen.