

June 7, 2020 Trinity as a Community of Love Genesis 1:1-2:4a Rev. Ross Leckie Caledon East U Church

Trinity Sunday has 'rolled 'round again. The Trinity is an interesting and puzzling idea-God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It sets a tone that life is to be interdependent. It is impossible to think of God as Father without also thinking of God as Son and God as Holy Spirit. It is also impossible to think of creation without a Creator, and a Creator without created beings.

Traditionally we would expect these first verses of the Bible were pointing to the first person of the Trinity, God the Father and Mother of us all, the creative energetic force of all creation. However, these verses also give us glimpses of the other two aspects of the mysterious Trinity. Those brief verses depict the immense power of the spirit of God that hovers and broods over all darkness and then offers the piercing image of the light of God that shines in the darkness and cannot be overcome by it. Genesis looks into the heart of darkness and sees something beautiful and hopeful: a creative force, a hovering spirit, and a penetrating light that cannot be overcome.

What is so central to Scripture is the message of God's creation of the whole world. It seems obvious, but this is missed so often. There is nothing exclusive offered here. This account begins not with the choosing of Abraham or the special status of Israel. It begins with creation. So, the believer must throw out any cultural or narrow understanding of God. "In the beginning when God created the world," not, "In the beginning God created Israel or the Scots or the British or the Irish. God's creational activity is inclusive. God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all humans, animals, insects, plants, bacteria-you name it, God created it.

Anne Lamott is an American novelist and non-fiction writer. Her writing is marked by self-deprecating humour and openness. Lamott's writings cover such subjects as alcoholism, single-motherhood, depression, and Christianity. She provides this encouragement for those grappling with Trinitarian theology: "I didn't need to understand the hypostatic unity of the Trinity; I just needed to turn my life over to whoever came up with redwood trees."

It has been a long time since I was in a redwood forest. Though there are some redwoods on Vancouver Island, you really have to travel to northern California to the coastal forest to see what a redwood forest is like. The redwood is the largest tree in the world, some are 300' tall. They can live for thousands of years. One might expect that such a tree would have roots that go very deeply in to the soil. But actually they only grow to a maximum depth of 6 feet, when they then go horizontally as much as 100 feet, intertwined with the other trees in their neighbourhood. They thrive best in thick groves where their roots can intertwine and sometimes in fuse together. This gives them tremendous strength against the forces of nature. So what would it look like to turn our lives over to the one who 'came up with redwood trees?'

Could that image give us pause in these times when division and contempt is being sown by some.

Search creation, search Scripture and search the history of the people of God. It's one thing to say that God values community. Or that God thinks community is good for us. It's altogether another to say that God *is* communal. That God *is* relationship, intimacy, connection, and communion. Evidence of this divine characteristic runs all through the Scriptures. When God the Son is baptized, God the Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and God the Father parts the heavens to speak delight and affirmation. The Spirit of God drives the Son of God into the wilderness, for a time of testing and preparation. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Son of God cries out to God the Father for help and solace. It is God the Father who raises the crucified Son, vindicating his death through resurrection. Throughout the Gospel story, the Three exist interdependently, leaning into each other. If God is interactive at God's very heart — if Three is the deepest nature of the One — then what are we doing when we isolate ourselves from each other? When we decide to go it alone? When we privilege independence and autonomy over companionship and mutuality? When we prioritize our individual "rights" over our care and concern for the most vulnerable among us? If the Trinity really is more than a bit of dusty doctrine the early Church fought over, then we dare not take lightly the life-changing power

of the communal. God is Relationship, and it is in relationship — with God, ourselves, each other, all creatures and the world — that we experience and embody God's nature.

A search of Scripture shows us that God is hospitable. In the 15th century, Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev created "The Hospitality of Abraham," also known as "The Trinity," one of the most well known and beloved icons in Christendom. In it, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (depicted as the three angels who appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre), sit around a table, sharing food and drink. Their faces are nearly identical, but they're dressed in different colors. The Father wears gold, the Son blue, and the Spirit green. The Father gazes at the Son. The Son gazes back at the Father, but gestures towards the Spirit. The Spirit gazes at the Father, but points toward the Son with one hand, and opens up the circle with the other, making room for others to join the sacred meal. As a whole, the icon exudes adoration and intimacy — clearly, the three persons around the table respect and enjoy each other. But it also exudes openness. There is space at the table for the viewer of the icon. For me. For us. As if to say, the point of the great Three-in-One is not exclusivity — God is not a middle school clique — but rather, radical hospitality. The point of the Three is always to add one more, to extend the invitation, to make the holy table more expansive and more welcoming. In fact, the deeper the intimacy between the Three grows, the roomier the table becomes. Likewise, the closer we draw to the adoration of the Three, the wider and more hospitable our hearts must grow towards the world.

Henri Nouwen, the well-known twentieth-century Dutch theologian and author, spent many hours gazing on this icon during a particular time in his life of severe depression. He said that gradually, over many months, through that image, he came to know the Trinity as a community of Love, a House of Love. In that household there was no fear, no greed, no anger, no violence, no anxieties, no pain, no suffering, even no words, only love, enduring love and deepening trust. It was a house, he said, in which he could dwell forever.

Why should we care about the three-in-one? We should care because we are children of the Trinity at a time when the world is reeling and desperate. We are the children of a mysterious, fluid, diverse, communal, hospitable, and loving God who wants to guide us into the whole truth of who God is and who we are. We should care because the mystery of the Trinity has the power to transform our hearts, leading us towards a more complete expression of God's desires, unity and diversity, hospitality and self-giving love. This week and always, may our lives reflect the transformative beauty of the Triune God.

Acknowledging Inspiration from:

Crumley, Carole, [Feasting on the Word](#), Year A, Volume 3, p.29-30

Thomas, Debie, [Journey with Jesus weekly webzine](#), May 31, 2020