



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

May 18, 2007

Trinity Sunday A
Reverend Donna Barr

Let me begin this morning by congratulating all our graduates from high school and college. I am grateful that we are taking time as a church to emphasize the importance of your education. I am proud that at St. John's we not only celebrate the graduates but we actually believe that beginning as early as 4th grade, it is vital that children learn reading skills. For those who are not familiar with our after school reading club, let me invite you to come and observe or even better to get involved. St. John's after school reading club offers children who are having difficulties in reading, an opportunity to receive personal one-on-one help and guidance in reading, not to mention building self esteem and confidence which enables success.

For me, education is the most important concern in our country and perhaps one of the most essential ministries we can offer as a church. For whether our places of learning are in schools or after school programs at churches, we are all called as Christians and as stewards of our children to help educate, guide, and model a love and respect for learning. We have a responsibility to our youth to point them toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world; questioning, exploring, searching, seeking knowledge and self discovery.

I know no one who speaks more eloquently on this subject than Parker Palmer, the highly respected writer on issues of education, community, spirituality and social change. Parker Palmer is a teacher in the truest sense of the word. In his book, "The Courage To Teach", he connects community and the sacred as the ways to greater insight for educators. As I went back to reread some of this book, I was amazed to discover again, his visions in education and those to God.

But today is not only a day of support for students and educators....it is marked by our church calendar, as Trinity Sunday. Albert Einstein once said, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." With these words, the brilliant physicist set forth a mandate – certainly for preachers and theologians on the Doctrine of the Trinity. As long as there has been students of theology and seekers of God, this subject, is explored but certainly is not simple.

The Doctrine of the Trinity has not been made simpler by its many images and connotations. Just to mention a few, let us hear some of our Trinitarian descriptions.

God, the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit

God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer

The Faith of God, the Hope of Christ, the Love of the Spirit

Alan's image a couple of weeks ago were:

The Eye of God, The Cross of Christ, The Dove of the

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Holy Spirit

God Almighty, King Jesus, Life-giving Spirit

The Love of God, The Grace of Christ, The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

With these many descriptions it is no wonder we are confounded. My husband, Garland and I, have just been to Ct. to visit our daughter's family. This road trip takes about 12 hours. It's always a good time for me to test out my sermons with a captive audience and get some well advised comments. He reminded me of his conversation with his 87 year old grandfather one week before his death. Many of his last days were confused but on this day he knew his grandson well and was very clear about his conversation. Son of a Baptist minister, "Pop", as he was known to us, asked Garland a very pressing question. He began by saying, "I have never fully understood the Trinity – can you explain it to me?" Garland, age 28, had studied accounting in school. His best attempt was, "Pop, surely you know more about this than I do!"

A retired Presbyterian minister, said it best, "Rather than insisting that scripture make the doctrine of the Trinity explicit, perhaps we should allow the Trinity to remain implicit and affirm it out of our own experience, our own living with God. He says that the best understanding he has ever received on the idea of Trinity came from two four-year-olds. While their mother's were out shopping he was babysitting his daughter and her friend. Somehow they decided that they were going to explain to him what they knew of the divine. I needed to know they advised me, that first there was God and God loves. Long, long ago God made everything. God is everywhere and sees everything but we can't see God. On the other hand, they said, you can see Jesus or at least pictures of Jesus because he was down here where we are. Jesus is simply wonderful and loves us very much, children as much as grown ups. If you can't see Jesus right now, it is because he is in heaven, but he stays in touch with us so well he might as well still be here. A lot of times it seems as if he is. Children are wonderful teachers!

From their perspective, nothing was missing. They had digested what was taught in the creation story and what was taught about Jesus in the Gospels. What they did not understand was how they were able to "stay in touch," as they would say. The communion of the Holy Spirit or sharing in the spirit is an adult self-consciousness. The experiences of adult living and trying to believe but knowing doubt, trying to do the right thing but knowing failure, trying to be confident but sensing despair.....is a knowing that God the spirit helps us through these obstacles. This part of the communion is different from God's love or Christ's gift of salvation. Sharing in this part of God leaves us able to say, with the conviction of Paul, that "nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. God is revealed as a loving Creator, a compassionate Savior and a mysterious presence allowing us to overcome what we could not on our own. This is the Trinity.

Parker Palmer reminds us that we cannot know or be educated about our subject well if we stand only in our own shoes. We must believe in the subject's inner life and enter with empathy into it. "We will know reality only by being in community with it ourselves." Sometimes as students, we find it difficult to understand things,

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but it is not hard to understand what we know in our experiences and in our heart. The Doctrine of the Trinity might be hard to understand but not so in our hearts. Matthew's Gospel is an appropriate way to mark the first Sunday of the longest season of the ecclesiastical calendar. This is the "ordinary time" that will extend until the beginning of Advent. As we enter the time of emphasis on discipleship we read this story at the end of Matthew's Gospel that inaugurates the disciples' mission and ministry. Jesus' final words of instruction are for his followers to make disciples - to baptize - and what else..... to teach.

In closing, my I offer St. Paul's lovely benediction.....

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."

Amen

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