

First Sunday After Pentecost: Trinity Sunday (Year A)
June 19, 2011 – St Paul’s Cathedral, Burlington VT

Genesis 1.1-2.4a
2 Corinthians 13.11-13
Matthew 28.16-20

In the Name of God, Source of all being, Incarnate Word, and Holy Spirit.

“I’ll be with you day in and day out, as you’ll see...” (Matthew 28.20).

On Trinity Sunday, I used to feel it was my responsibility to explain and even to defend God. I don’t think that any more. I’ve come to realize that God can take care of herself, or whatever word we might use to try to describe what is indescribable. “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” was our attempt today. We saw the very same combination of three nouns in today’s gospel. This way of describing God as trinity “is found nowhere else in the New Testament, but over the centuries it became the basis for the concept of the Trinity.”¹ And, just a minute ago I made another attempt: “In the Name of God, Source of all being, Incarnate Word, and Holy Spirit.” And that’s the problem. What words do we use to describe what is not easy to describe: the source of all being, the ground of everything, God?

The people who crafted the Nicene Creed were pioneers, mystics, who tried to articulate this reality in their own experience and from their own perspective. In the Trinity then we discover “the attempt not to know but to approach God, the finding of religious bliss or ecstasy not in static communion with, but in infinite movement toward an ever mysterious deity.”² And on Trinity Sunday we are confronted not with a doctrine (impossible to understand and hard to swallow) but a real encounter of the living God, with experience itself. We are encouraged to step out on a journey of discovery of our own, toward this ever-mysterious God; and, today’s gospel expressed how people respond quite differently: “*And when they saw him, they paid him homage; but some were dubious.*” Someone once made Trinity Sunday’s point.

We are dog-paddling on the surface of a fathomless sea. Indeed that fathomless sea...is called *love*... As fish live and move and have their being in the sea, so we...exist *in* the love of God. That love is the medium, the framework, the setting, and context of our lives.³

On Trinity Sunday, we celebrate “that fathomless sea called love.” The love of God is the medium, the framework, the setting, the context of our lives. We exist in the environment, the atmosphere, the reality of God’s love. We long to be aware of this deeply personal, intimate relationship with God, the source of all being. Love itself.

It’s all about love. I scratch my head in puzzlement, even incredulity, when I hear religious people act like love isn’t what it’s all about; and, when things like judgment, responsibility, anger, or power replace this “fathomless sea called love;” when you can’t see love as the active motivating

¹ Robert T. Fortna, *The Scholars Bible: Matthew*, pp. 244-5.

²B. Otis, "Nicene Orthodoxy and Fourth Century Mysticism," *Actes du 11e Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines*, Belgrade, 1964, p. 475.

³ A sermon preached by the Revd Canon Dr Richard A. Norris at St Ignatius’ Church, New York City, Trinity Sunday, 2003.

principle in someone's life. If love, compassion, and caring for the well being of others aren't paramount then it's not God as Trinity that inspires us. It's not orthodox! St Paul wrote: *The harvest of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5.22). We prayed for those fruits of the Spirit last Sunday at Rowan Stirling's baptism: "Give her an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works."⁴ It's the Christian's attitude. Love is who we are. So God's promise today is quite extraordinary. *"I'll be with you day in day out, as you'll see"* (Matthew 28.20). God, this limitless, boundless sea, love itself, is *"with you day in day out."*

Some commencements ago the now former chaplain of Harvard College, the late Peter Gomes, said the same thing to graduating seniors.⁵

You are going to be sent out of here for good, and most of you aren't ready to go. The president is about to bid you into the fellowship of educated men and women, and you know just – how – dumb – you – really – are. [He paused for cheers of agreement]. And worse than that, the world – and your parents in particular – are going to expect that you will now be among the brightest and best. But you know that you can no longer fool all the people even some of the time. By noontime today, you will be out of here. By tomorrow, you will be history. By Saturday, you will be toast. That's a fact – no exceptions, no extensions.

Dr Gomes assured them their best years were ahead of them and that God will be with them.

The future is God's gift to you. God will not let you stumble or fall. God has not brought you this far to this place to abandon you or leave you here alone and afraid. The God of Israel never stumbles, never sleeps, never goes on sabbatical. Thus, my beloved and bewildered young friends, do not be afraid.

Dr Gomes, like Matthew, is certain God is with us.

Let's understand Matthew's point because each gospel has it differently. Mark's gospel ends too abruptly. John's gospel collapses the timetable that other gospels elaborate when the disciples receive the Holy Spirit on Easter evening. Luke's gospel spreads it out over 50 days. But it's not Matthew's understanding. Matthew has Jesus say: *"I'll be with you day in day out, as you'll see..."*

Matthew has only one resurrection appearance... And there is no question of Jesus ascending at the end of the appearance. Rather the whole point...is that the risen Jesus comes *to* his church, to remain with it all days... The death-resurrection...has brought the believer into a new age, free of the old barriers...⁶

In Matthew, "the risen Jesus comes *to* his church, to remain with it all days." There is no Ascension. No leaving. Only remaining. Only being-with. Hold on to Matthew's perspective. The risen Christ comes to us. The risen Christ stays with us, *"day in day out, as you'll see..."* It's why the Eucharist is so powerful. We celebrate the continuing, abiding, remaining, being-with-us presence of the risen Christ. You may have noticed that we've moved the chairs. This summer set up with the altar in the center around which we all gather will help us remember this essential teaching. Desmond Tutu, in conversation with Richard Rohr in Cape Town said: "We are only the light bulbs, Richard, and our job is just to remain screwed in." If we want to shine as God's light in the world, we've got to

⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), p. 308.

⁵ Carey Goldberg, 'At a Harvard Rite, Solace for Seniors', *The New York Times*, Friday, June 5, 1998, A14.

⁶ John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew* (New York, 1979), pp. 37ff.

stay connected: connected through prayer, through the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, connected to the community through one another – screwed into the source of life itself.⁷

God's love is realized in our relationships.

We only achieve being through relationships with others, with other real persons. A glimpse of this mystery...appears in the image of the Trinity. The internal being of God exists as relationship, a love so vital and vividly expressed that only the image of persons in unceasing connection to each other can capture it.⁸

What if we thought about God that way? – “a love so vital and vividly expressed...of persons in unceasing connection to each other...” What if we really saw God's very presence dwelling in the center of our lives and in other people, in every person we met or saw each day? What if we practiced “unceasing connection to each other.”

A Calvin and Hobbes cartoon shows six-year Calvin standing in front of the mirror. He is obviously admiring what he sees: smiling, proud, and full of himself. Then he holds his arms up in the air as if flexing his, as yet, un-developed upper-body: “Made in God's image, yes sir!” But Hobbes, Calvin's very real, imaginary, stuffed tiger says: “God must have a goofy sense of humor.” “Made in God's image, yes sir!” and “God must have a goofy sense of humor” are the poles between which we live. We are made in God's image as *Genesis* says today and very afraid God made a very crucial mistake by creating me. You and I are made in God's image, even when we don't believe it. So we over compensate. We fail to believe it when God says we're good, who likes us just the way we are. We overwork. We overachieve. We get caught up spending too much money on things we don't need to try to impress others about our worth. We anesthetize ourselves to life. We live in denial about God's good news.

Think how different our life would be. Deeply converted to our neighbor. To ministry in our city. To those different from us. To be a Trinitarian Christian then above all else is to be a lover.

“I'll be with you day in day out, as you'll see...”

⁷ Peter Elliott, "This is what we live for!" Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver, Easter 7, 2011.

⁸ Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Primary Speech, A Psychology of Prayer*, Atlanta, 1982, pp. 85-86.