

May 30, 2010 – Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr. [PDF] (Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15)

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus says to his disciples on the night before he is to be handed over to suffering and death, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” I wonder if Jesus had in mind something about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Today we celebrate Trinity Sunday. We reflect on the mystery of there being one God who is at the same time three distinct entities that we often refer to as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And if Jesus kept this doctrine from his disciples because they could not bear it, I’m not so sure that we are much more able to bear it today. The Spirit may have guided some of the mystics and theologians of the church into all truth, but for many of us the truth of the Trinity eludes us. And we are quite frankly not too worried about it.

We’re fine to know that it exists. To say we believe it in the creeds, but many of us don’t feel an overwhelming desire to contemplate the details of how one could be three or three could be one. We may worry a little bit about what we call the Trinity, whether our words are too biased toward the male gender or whether our alternatives are theologically correct. But even these debates are not of vital interest to most of us. We have other questions. How do we live a good life, a holy life? How do we deal with the fact that we tend to stray away from God’s peace and grace? How do we love our neighbors or at least not hate the ones that are really annoying?

These questions weigh on us a little more heavily. And what does the Trinity have to do with these more pressing questions? At least in theory the model of a triune God, a God who is perfectly one union in three separate parts is the answer to all our questions. At least in theory, if we want to live a good and holy life, look at the Trinity. Those three persons co-existing in harmonious relationship glorifying and sharing with each other. Jesus says in today’s reading, “The Spirit will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.” The three persons of the Trinity take from one another, glorify one another without competition or stinginess. Want to live a good and holy life? Just be like the Trinity.

In terms of when we stray from God’s love and peace, when we sin, the Trinity is also the answer to our questions, for God is offering us forgiveness through Jesus, communicated to us by the Holy Spirit. We are worried about forgiveness? Just think about the Trinity. As far as loving our neighbors, we see the ideal neighborly relationship in those interlocking rings of the Trinity in their perfect communion where we can seek that same kind of relationship where we are our own distinct persons yet part of a unified whole. So just be like the Trinity. It’s that simple. No wonder Jesus said, “I have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now.” Because just as we might be able to hear and even say we believe, how the Trinity relates to our concerns, can we really bear it? Can we really carry that vision into reality? We barely understand it, so how can we possibly make it real and tangible? The Trinity is perfect, we are not perfect.

As much as we might like to live a Trinitarian existence, to be in that perfect communion of eternally flowing love, it’s too much for us to bear, to carry. It’s too heavy, it’s too awkward, it’s too strange. We may believe that the Trinity is the answer to our questions, but what good is that if we can’t carry it forward.

One way that we I think sometimes try and cope with the fact that we can't bear the Trinity is sometimes we divide up the Trinity. We say, "Well, you know, I'm not sure how all these three fit together, so today I'm more focused on Jesus. Or today I'm more focused on God the Creator. Or when I'm really sick of both of them, I just focus on the Holy Spirit." It's okay to be Spiritual, you know? And I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that approach, but it's not the Trinitarian faith that we've been given. So maybe the question is not, "What can we bear or what can't we bear?" Maybe the question is, "Can we guided?" Jesus says in the Gospel today, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." Spirit is a guide leading us.

Some mystics of the church through the centuries in their direct experience of God the Holy Trinity have described the Trinity as a dance. Three separate partners moving in such unity that they are one. You imagine the most graceful dancers you've ever seen or the graceful figure skaters. They move together in such a way that they are like one being. So imagine that multiplied by like a trillion. And that's the Trinity. Three partners moving in perfect harmony together in a heavenly dance. And that dance, that Trinity, is reaching out to us to invite us into its motion, into all truth. That is an amazing gift that God has no secrets. That God has no limit on how much God is willing to share with us. The Spirit will guide us into all truth. The Spirit is holding out its hand to say to us, "Come and dance. I will lead you. I will be your leader. Take my hand."

We are tempted to resist the dance. To stand in the corner, "I'm just not good at dancing. I'm clumsy, God. I don't know how to live in perfect communion with my neighbors. I don't know how you're going to forgive me when I stray from your love. I don't know how to live a holy life where I share with everybody and glorify everybody the way you seem to in the Trinity." But that doesn't matter. We can't envision ourselves dancing as the Spirit is ready to lead us into the dance. Into that never ceasing act of mutual glorification and sharing. We may be clumsy, but with the Spirit's guidance, we may be able to take a few steps.

Jesus says that the Spirit will speak and declare to us the things that are to come. So if the Spirit is speaking, then our job is not to figure it all out. Our job is not to come up with all the right answers and to fix every little thing. Certainly theologians have tried over the centuries to explain the Trinity, to put it into a systematic framework that makes sense. And that may be part of their job. But for most of us, our job is to be available and to listen for that speaking Spirit. To reach out our hands and instead of saying, "No, no, no, no." Say, "Yes, yes, I will dance. With your guidance." The dance of the Trinity is happening everywhere at every time. It's happening in this worship space, in liturgy. It happens when we can quiet ourselves in our prayer rooms, but it also happens even in the awkward hustle and bustle of our lives.

Someone was telling me recently about how he was in a real hurry to get somewhere. He had so much to do, it was more than he could bear. And as he was getting out of his car late for his next appointment, he suddenly became aware of the wind blowing by. Then he became aware of trees swaying gently in that wind and clouds moving across the sky. And he realized suddenly the world was bigger than himself. The world was bigger than all the things he needed to get done. For a moment the dance had caught him. It was a moment of freedom. It was a Trinity moment when one person realized he was connected to more than himself in a way that brought

everything together. It was a dancing Trinity moment. His worries didn't go away. His to-do list did not get any shorter, but he realized that he was not bearing these things alone and that in the midst of them he could smile. Maybe even dance. That's the Trinity. We don't need to understand it or bear it alone in our feeble and limited minds.

A Franciscan teacher and preacher named Richard Rohr once said, "All we have to do is say yes." The Spirit is leading us. Christ came to dance among us. God the creator called us into being and called us into a moving, flowing relationship and with these three who are one we will bear things we thought impossible. We will bear deep suffering, we will bear rich joy. Trinity is inviting us to dance. To be drawn into its flowing, loving communion of mutual delight. Shall we dance? Let us pray. Oh, God, Holy Trinity, you have many things to say to us and we cannot bear them all. Send your Spirit of truth to guide us and lead us into your dance so that we might glorify you. Help us to say yes. To give you what is ours, to receive what is yours and to declare all truth to the world. Amen.