

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

May 30, 2010

Trinity Sunday

Psalm 8

John 16:12-15

From the Perspective of the Trinity

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:3-4)

When Russell Schweikart returned from the Apollo IX mission to outer space, he wrote:

[I saw] the earth not as something big... [but] as a small thing out there. And the contrast between that bright blue and white Christmas tree ornament and the black sky, that infinite universe, really comes through, and the size of it, the significance of it. It is so small and fragile and such a precious little spot in that universe that you can block it out with your thumb, and you realize that on that small spot, that little blue and white thing, is everything that means anything to you – all of history, and music and poetry and art and death and birth and love, all the tears, joy, games, all of it on that little spot out there that you can cover with your thumb. (*No Frames, No Boundaries*, 1977)

It's all a matter of perspective.

In fact, all of our lives are lived on the basis of our perspectives. The graduates that we honor at this time of year have a perspective that can be described as on top of the world, right? They are celebrating a significant accomplishment. But soon that perspective will change and life will be seen through the nervous eyes of a college freshman or first year grad student or new kid on the block at work. We all see different things at different times. Perspective makes a difference.

A wealthy oil baron once commissioned Picasso to paint a portrait of his wife. When the work was completed, the baron was shocked to see the image that had been created. "Why that looks nothing like my wife! You should have painted her the way she really is!"

Picasso took a deep breath and said, "I'm not sure what that would be."

Without hesitation, the oil baron pulled out his wallet and removed a photograph of his wife saying, "There, you see, this is how she really is!"

Picasso, bending over, looked at it and replied, "She is rather small and flat, isn't she?"

Perspective.

Today is Trinity Sunday on the church calendar, the only Sunday set aside during the entire year to honor a doctrine. As you may know, the word “trinity” is found nowhere in the Bible; but the doctrine of the Trinity does come from a faithful reading of the scriptures and an attempt to articulate an understanding of God.

God in three persons, blessed Trinity, as we sang in our opening hymn.

Today, pastors in churches all around the world are trying to explain the mystery of the Trinity – how can God be “three persons” without being three gods?

Some will use the illustration of H²O – depending on the circumstances we find those same elements as either water or ice or steam – same composition of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, but three different ways of experiencing those elements.

Or I might say to my husband, “I am your wife,” to my daughter, “I am your mother,” and to you, “I am your pastor.” Same person, but from different perspectives.

None of those examples though is exactly accurate in explaining the mystery of the Trinity. The truth is, no matter what we say about God, it will NEVER be enough.

And what we DO say, will depend on our perspective. Beyond that, we can let it go with the words of the psalmist, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth?”

Perspective:

A man had an awful day at work. Everything had gone wrong. There was one interruption after another, and he was never able to complete the days work. When he walked through the door of his home that evening, he knew that his wife must have had a similar day. He could see it on her face.

So, he began right away, “I have had the worst day of my life; it’s been bad news, bad news, bad news. I don’t know what kind of a day you’ve had, but if at all possible, can you share some good news with me?”

The wife, a thoughtful and loving person, considered his request for a moment, and then said, “Of course I can. You know we have six beautiful children, right?” He agreed. “Well,” she said, “five of them didn’t break a leg today.”

Perspective – from what perspective will you view life when you move through the week this week? Because it will make a difference.

Through the eyes of the world, it was another brutal murder in a brutal existence;
Through the eyes of faith, it was God so loving the world that he gave his only Son to assure us we are forgiven.

Through the eyes of the world, he was another religious fanatic bent on terrorism;
Through the eyes of faith, Saul of Tarsus could become the greatest missionary the church has ever known.

Through the eyes of the world, those poor and hungry and sick and imprisoned are a nuisance;
Through the eyes of faith, they are an opportunity to meet Christ.

Through the eyes of the world, we are too small and powerless to make a difference;
Through the eyes of faith, we know that when we walk out of here, we do not walk out alone –
we go with each other, and our God goes before and with us, and that is power.

Through the eyes of the world, you and I are unbelievably insignificant – just one of six-billion-plus;
Through the eyes of faith, we are incredibly important – God know us so intimately that even the
hairs of our heads are numbered.

How will you see things this week?
Remember it's all in the perspective.

And the Trinity gives us its own take on, not just God, but on how as Christians we ought to be
in the world. And we get this perspective in one word – perichoresis (Greek).

Perichoresis is a word which describes the intense, interpersonal relationship between the 3
persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. It is an intimacy that might make us
uncomfortable, because we cannot comprehend it. Words like cleaving and indwelling apply
here.

Three and One all at the same time. We shouldn't be able to understand it. If you're one of those
people, who says, "The Trinity? I just don't get it," then you are first of all in good company
with many of the finest theologians throughout history. And secondly, you are also rightly
acknowledging (like the person who wrote Psalm) that God is God and you are not.

But perichoresis doesn't only refer to who the Trinity IS, but also to what it DOES – and what it
does is dance! It's as if we can see this indwelling and interplay between the three and it looks
like dancing. But no one is leading – they are truly equals.

This is what the Christian life looks like – this is what the church should look like.

Cleaving to each other, affection for each other, unique persons who are somehow one body
dancing together as equals.

And we are equals, not because of any generous spirit of our own, or our ability to set aside the
different ways people reflexively judge, sort and categorize each other. No we are equals because
God's love for us is equal and generous.

The love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is bigger than any doctrine can explain or
contain. And similarly when we come together as the church, we find a deeper fellowship we
can't explain and that in turn causes us to be more loving, more generous people.

When Jesus was baptized God said, "You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased." And He
says the same to us, "You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased."

All of this sounds good, but what does this look like when it is actually lived out?

One man, Chuck Robertsons, tells this true story. Years ago, he was walking on the
campus of Emory University in Atlanta when from a distance he saw Desmond Tutu,
Nobel Laureate and Archbishop Emeritus of South Africa. He was guest-teaching there

at the time and accompanied by a large handler. Eager to meet this legendary figure, he ran up, only to be immediately put off. "The bishop is busy," he was told.

Turning away and feeling like little more than chopped liver, he suddenly heard a small but powerful voice: "Come, come." As he approached him, Bishop Tutu smiled and said, "Tell me your name." He did, and he responded, "And tell me about yourself." For the next ten minutes, Chuck received his full and complete attention. For that time, he was someone of infinite value. As he turned to leave, the bishop looked him in the eye and quietly said, "I will remember you, Chuck Robertson."

Not chopped liver. No. Beloved. God's Beloved. Part of the Dance.

The Apostle Paul spoke of such care, such "charity" in 1 Corinthians 13. This charity is no mere handout given to an anonymous person on the street while taking care not to make true eye contact.

No, the charity that Paul speaks of is that classic King James Version, put-your-feelings-into-action kind of love, patient and kind, not jealous or self-centered, not keeping a checklist of wrongs done against us. It is a love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." It is "a still more excellent way" of relating to one another. It is love that we see in God's own self – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As I look around, too often I see people who desperately need to know this love – people who feel alone, cast out, not beloved. What would happen if we looked at all those around us with fresh eyes, from a new perspective, seeing not rivals or annoyances or, perhaps worst of all, as invisibles...but rather God's Beloved ones, God's Dance partners?

Have you ever been on an airplane and seen individuals trying to carry on board huge, oversized bags stuffed to the brim. They pant and sweat and curse under their breath as they struggle to fit their baggage into the overhead compartment, refusing to be helped their airline hosts stand ready to take off their backs.

Too often we carry the weight of the world on our all-too human shoulders, feeling guilt and responsibility and resentment. On this Trinity Sunday, God gives us a priceless gift and a new perspective – one that feeds our souls and that we can share others.

When life's baggage has become so full, so heavy, that we have forgotten who we are and whose we are, we are reminded that God is God, and we are not.

And also that our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is relationship, is Divine Dance, and is Love.

And we, and you, are God's Beloved. Amen.