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“God of Relationships”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Trinity Sunday (Year B)

May 31, 2015

Isaiah 6:1–8; Romans 8:12–17; John 3:1-17

As the liturgical cycle brings us to the conclusion in our celebrations of the death and resurrection, the ascension into glory of the Lord Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, we move next week back to the passage of “Ordinary Time.” But the church pauses in between and sets aside a day dedicated to a teaching. It is the most important of all the teachings of the church but nonetheless a doctrine: the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, we celebrate today, between the end of the forty days of Lent and the fifty days of Easter and before we move back into Ordinary Time, the theme of God as a God of relationships, a Triune God, and a communion of persons.

Kathy Parkins warned me all week long that preaching on the Trinity is dicey. She emailed me a slide that said, “How Not to Commit Heresy Preaching on the Trinity.” It had a picture of little kittens playing in a basket. The answer to the question is: “say nothing and show pictures of kittens instead.” So I responded that I was going to go to the Book of Confessions and give you the final word. So I went to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (17th century), a very important standard that has been a Presbyterian guide for so many centuries. In the second chapter, these are the words about God and the Holy Trinity:

III. In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally

begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

You say to yourselves, “I don’t understand!” And yet, the early Christian church was forced by the spirit of inquiry over centuries to take their experience of God in this Triune Father, Son, and Spirit’s naming to form creeds and confessions that try to capture the mystery of the Scriptures that witness to their experience. The early Christian church did not have philosophical discussions and debates about the inner life of the Godhead as did many churches and Christians that followed them. That is the reason why we’re going to recite together the Nicene Creed that was the result of the famous Council of Nicaea in the fourth century that tried to put an end to all the heresies of people trying to grapple with what the relationship is between this Jesus sent by God by the Father and their Spirit that proceeds from them both. I think it’s true, despite the complex nature of all these philosophical discussions that we allow the Scriptures to speak for themselves in our experience of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let us take a moment and look at the text that we heard from chapter 3 of John’s Gospel. It provides us with an opening towards new vistas, new understandings, and new appreciations on the life of our experiences of God as Triune, in which that character of a relational God is expressed. We are brought into a more intimate understanding of the way in which we have a relationship with God in that three-fold way that makes sense.

As you just heard, Nicodemus engaged in a conversation with Jesus that revolved around whether or not it was possible for people to be born again. As you can tell, in the context read, Jesus facilitated the conversation, but Nicodemus never really heard the message. As soon as he went to Jesus and complimented him as being a man with the presence of God, Jesus immediately took the upper hand by saying, “I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God, the Father, without being born from above.” Nicodemus said, “How is that possible? How can someone who is old go back into the mother’s womb?” Jesus then repeated himself: “I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit.”

Then he goes on to discourse about the power of the spirit, that the wind blows

where it will: we don't know where it comes from, we don't know where it goes, and that's the same thing true for the power of the spirit: it's beyond our calculations, beyond our scrutiny, and has a power of its own in the life of those who believe in Jesus as Lord, who leads us to be able to say that our God is Abba.

Nicodemus kept saying, "How can these things be?" Jesus goes on to describe the fact, in this most famous of all Scriptures, that God so loved the world, God is the God of love, that He gave, passed on, begot, sent His only Son so that everyone one of us who believe in Him may not perish, but have fullness, eternal life.

Nicodemus didn't get it. Yet, there is a little bit of Nicodemus in all of us. Jesus goes on to say that this is the judgment that the light has come into the world, and people love darkness. We are always tempted in so many ways to be discouraged by the troubles in our world, our city, our county, our state, our nation. There is a sort of cynicism that it is impossible for people to really change from their prejudices, from their predilections to war or injustices. There is this quiet fear that we can't change, that there is no possibility for new beginnings or for being reborn into eternal life that is bigger and better than what we have.

And yet, that is the challenge for this Trinity Sunday. It is not to unravel the great mystery of the inscrutable mystery of the Godhead, but to recognize that our relationship with one another is the basis for our entrance into the very family of God as community of persons. We are invited to take the risk of faith. We are invited to believe and to trust. We are invited to a rebirth, a rebirth that we have already experienced in the waters of baptism. We are invited to reaffirm that. It is something that we really believe. Secondly, we are invited to be a new creation and to have a new entry into God's kingdom. What makes this all possible is this text from Romans: "We are a people led by the Spirit, and therefore, we are children of God" (Romans 8:14). We are led by the Spirit and have the power to cry, "Abba!" to call God our Father in that intimate way. We are led by that spirit, and we are given the chance to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. If we suffer with Him, so also may we be glorified with Him.

I invite you to accept the invitation that this Gospel offers you on this Trinity Sunday, and to do it in the privileged place of your prayer life by being a little

more conscious of the way in which we pray as a Christian church. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are forgiven of our sin in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are invited to pray the prayer of Jesus, where we claim God as our Father; and in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, there is a fundamental structure to it that is Triune: we pray to God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, through Christ Jesus, our Lord, in the One Spirit.

Accept the challenge and the opportunity to reaffirm your conviction of faith, that you are a people of the Trinity because you have been saved in Christ Jesus through the one Spirit that leads us all together, his church, to God, our Father. Amen.

Acknowledgements:

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