

The Trinity in Community

Trinity Sunday – Year C – June 3, 2007

We've been given a wonderful gift. A mystery with more clues than we can count. A mystery with more characters that we can ever meet. A mystery that we'll never be able to figure out. And it's a mystery that's also been set to a musical. All we need to do is to 'hang on' and enjoy the dance.

We've come again to Trinity Sunday. The one time each year when the church calls upon us to reflect together on doctrine. It is also the anniversary of my arrival at Christ Church, to join with you in ministry as your Rector. I remember last year, as I was telling my friends in the priesthood about my pending move here to Poughkeepsie, the conversation would almost always come around to: *Oh no! Your first Sunday is going to be Trinity Sunday. You're going to have to preach on the Trinity Your very first Sunday in the pulpit. That's too bad.* So many people tend to shy away from conversations – And sermons – about the

Trinity. "It's all so complicated. It's all so dense. Who can possibly figure it out?"

Those fears surrounding the Trinity Are reflective of our Western obsession With the need to 'figure things out.' Last year – when I preached that first sermon on the Trinity – I quoted Alan Giles from his book *Always Open, Being Anglican Today*:

When faced with the impenetrable mystery of God, the instinct of the Eastern Church is to bow down and worship; the instinct of the church in the West is to reach for a microscope and attempt to analyze what is going on.

Alan has hit the nail right on the head. We are *obsessed* with the need to 'figure things out.' I'll let you in on a great secret that we were taught in seminary: *We are not going to figure out the Trinity.* It is a mystery.

Many of us like to read mystery novels, Or watch them on TV. My parents and I were big fans of television shows That were mysteries. During the commercials we'd go over the clues: Who said what to whom; Which clues we had noticed. We enjoyed 'the hunt' as Sherlock Holmes would say. It was a lot of fun to try and be the first one To 'figure it out.'

Now, we have before us a mystery that is all together different. We've been given plenty of clues. Many of the characters are well-developed. We've been left with a pretty good narrative story. The plot is clear. But this is a mystery that we are not going to figure out. All that we can really do is engage the story, hang on, and enjoy the ride – or better yet, enjoy the dance.

You've probably often seen a graphic image that is an attempt to explain the Trinity. It will almost always be in the shape of a triangle. At each of the three points will be the names that we've assigned to the different persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There's a problem with a triangle – somebody is always at the 'top point' of the image. With a triangle, it's hard to avoid the creation of a hierarchy, and that creates a problem when we think about the Trinity. There is no hierarchy – all three Persons are equal. Some theologians will even double up on that concept, and say that the Persons of the Trinity are Co-Equal.

Since we mostly have words to express our thoughts and concepts, we are always going to have difficulty in talking about God. Instead of the traditional triangle, with its three points, I prefer the image of a circle. No points, no words, no beginning, no end. No need to consider who is first,

who is second or who is third. No hierarchy. An image of a circle helps me frame my thoughts about God within the traditions of the Eastern Church that talks about the Trinity with an idea of a dance. An eternal dance between the persons of the Trinity. No one leading – no one following. Just – everyone dancing in perfect harmony, and in perfect rhythm.

Another construct that is often used when discussing the Trinity is that of *community*. And it is that idea of community that has the most to offer us today. I suggest that we don't have to struggle so much with finding the best words we can find to describe the Trinity. We have the opportunity to live with to live into, to experience, the ultimate reality of the Trinity every day. We don't need to get distracted with so many words. We've been given a clue - a very early clue in the mystery of the Trinity.

We need to go all the way back to Genesis, and hear again the words from the very first story. *Then God said, Let us make humankind in our image. So God created humankind. In the image of God they were created. Male and female they were created.*

It is within the community that we share when we are in relationship with each other, that we best experience God. We don't need to describe God so much, as we need to just 'hang on' and experience God,

as we experience community with each other.

We can experience that community of love that exists within the Trinity, within all our relationships. That community of love is in our relationships – it's within our relationships – it's between our relationships – it's among our relationships – it's around our relationships.

As we've been brought together in this parish, in this place, at this time, that community love is especially evident here.

- It is evident in the love that we share with each other when we are happy and when we are in grief.
- When we marry, baptize or bury.
- When we teach and celebrate the lives of our children, and when we sing in the choir.
- When we welcome a visitor to the parish.
- When we prepare a parish breakfast – and when we eat a parish breakfast.

Our work and ministry in the larger community outside these walls provides us with the wonderful opportunity to experience the divine dance of love that exists within the Trinity in totally new ways. Whether it's in our local neighborhood, in an ESL class, in the Dutchess County Jail, or helping a young child learn to read. Every encounter – every relationship with another child of God – with a child of God created in the image of

God – brings us deeper and deeper into that dance.

The divine dance of co-equal, co-eternal, eternal and infinite love that we believe exists within the mind of God. We've been given a wonderful gift. A mystery with more clues than we can count. A mystery with more characters that we can ever meet. A mystery that we'll never be able to figure out. And it's a mystery that's also been set to a musical. All we need to do is to 'hang on' and enjoy the dance.