

With You Always
Trinity Sunday
June 7, 2020
Trinity Bixby
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Genesis 1:1-2:4, selected
Matthew 28:16-20 (NLT)

It is Trinity Sunday – a day always wrapped in mystery and wonder. A day when we take time to contemplate and wonder about the nature of God, active in the world as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. But, with all that has happened this week, we may find ourselves saying, “Really? Is this what’s important right now?”

The deaths of George Floyd, Breona Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery have charged us, once again, with the need for repentance as a society. A need to turn back to God’s ways of justice and to examine and reexamine our understanding of the world and how we treat each other. The protests around the country and the world have continued this week – so much so that this is now the widest civil-rights protest in world history. The righteous anger at injustice is bubbling over into the streets, not just in the inner cities, or in predominantly segregated areas – no, this call for justice has spread far and wide. Some are using the protests as cover for theft, destruction, and inciting violence, but the vast majority of those in the daylight protests are crying for justice, wanting peace not by hostility, but through true reconciliation and understanding of the centuries of pain suffered when one group of people oppresses another.

We Christians are called to stand with the oppressed, not the oppressor. We follow a movement that began as an uprising against the unchecked power of foreign oppression, with a leader put to death by a man who knew that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against him, but who was so afraid of the political circumstances that he ordered a public execution to go forward. We worship God, who created all humanity in the image of God, regardless of skin color, gender,

sexual orientation, or any of the other ways we discriminate against each other. We are inspired by the Holy Spirit who baptizes, who immerses us into the one body of Christ, that if one of us feel pain, all of us should feel and react to it.

Jesus, the resurrected martyr, who died that all may live. God, the creator of all humanity. The Spirit of truth, inspirational companion to all. We are back to a formula of three-in-one, the Trinity. The Holy Trinity. Holy, set apart, sacred – but “with us always, even to the end of the age.” A paradoxical mystery – how can one be three and three, one? How can that which is set apart be that which is with us always?

Even the great reformed theologian, Shirley Guthrie Jr, put it this way: “The doctrine of the Trinity does not try to explain the mystery of the triune God; it tries to preserve a mystery that cannot be explained without “explaining it away” in one false direction or another. What is finally important is not that we comprehend the mystery itself but that we see how the doctrine of the Trinity functions in Christian thinking about who God is and what God is doing in our lives and in the world around us... the Trinity is a mystery to be confessed, not a mathematical problem to be solved.”¹

In other words, even though we can't fully understand the Trinity, and will never be able to, we can still engage with the Trinity in doing the work of God. Think of it this way: we all have been in relationships with people we didn't fully understand – I mean, I don't think we can ever fully understand anyone. Did that stop us from having a relationship – whether romantic, friendly, working, or otherwise? Of course not. And the more time we spend in relationship, the better we get to know each other. The same is true with the Trinity – the more time we spend with the Triune God, the more we understand.

And, my friends, the Trinity is calling us through our relationship to reach out and support each other. No one can do everything – but together, we can do everything that God is calling us to do. And the thing that the Triune God calls us

¹ (Guthrie 1994, 84, 95)

to do, over and over again in the Bible, is love each other. “Love each other as I have loved you” proclaims Jesus. “Love your neighbor as yourself,” Jesus quotes from Leviticus. Paul reminds the church in Corinth that even though we can only partially understand, or “see only a dim reflection in tarnished brass,” three things always remain: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.

The Rev. Layton Williams reminds us that “in theory, we love protestors, but in practice, we rarely love them well. Protest stirs things up. It draws hard lines. It gives voice and visibility to dissent and division that we would prefer to ignore or deal with more quietly. Protest functions as an inescapable mirror of truth, reflecting back to us how often the unity we idealize is a hollow illusion that requires silent suffering and injustice to persist.”² Right now, many are feeling called to protest. But all of us are called to love each other – protestors and police officers; black skin, brown skin, and white skin; republican and democrat; straight or LGBTQ. Love those that reveal the hard truths – and love those who struggle with you and opposite you. And remember that the Trinity is with you, always, as your love overflows into the world.

My cousins Amber and Jeff, and their three-year-old son Trevor joined the protests in Culver City, California this week. Jeff said, “We give our voice to a movement that now means more to us than ever before... As white parents of a black son, we can only hope that Mr. Floyd’s murder is the catalyst our nation needs to unravel the systemic racism that’s woven into the last 400 years of our culture’s fabric.” Trevor, their son, has a neighbor friend of his age who shared a beautiful piece of art, with the message, “I understand that I will never understand. But I will always stand. We live with LOVE in our <3’s.” They haven’t been able to play together for months, due to COVID-19 social distancing. But these two children exchange heartfelt waves and loving artwork. It is evidence of what can be.

The Rev. Lenny Duncan, in his book “Dear Church: a love letter from a black preacher to the whitest denomination in the US”³ encourages the church to do

² (Williams 2019, 125)

³ The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

likewise. “Dear Church, we are the ones we have been waiting for. No one else is coming. You are the generation that has been chosen for this time, this place, this moment in human history. Stop waiting for some sort of transformative leader to arise from the body politic or the body of Christ. It is you. You with all your flaws, fears, and doubts, brokenness and downright utter humanness – you are called for more...you are being drafted to wage peace on the world. When someone gives you hell, you are ordered to give them heaven. This is a radical and dangerous act... Waging peace is more dangerous than waging war.”⁴

We are called to wage peace, through the love we learn in relationship with the Triune God. In his last words in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus sets the charge upon those who follow him: “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to observe all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The Trinity is with us always, yes, even in these difficult times. Our calling is to teach as Jesus taught, with love for all the world, waging peace by immersing each other in the grace and love of the Trinity. Even though we may not ever understand, we can still stand together, for God is with us, always. Amen.

⁴ (Duncan 2019, 124-125)



Works Cited

Duncan, Lenny. *Dear Church: a love letter from a black preacher to the whitest denomination in the U.S.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019.

Guthrie, Shirley Jr. *Christian Doctrine.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

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