

Trinity Sunday June 11, 2017 Genesis 1:1-2:4a; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

*Come, Join The Dance of Trinity*

Why don't you just become Unitarians? I don't know how many times I've been asked that question. When I talk about my understanding of God as the Holy One and of all of creation as part of this One, it's almost inevitable that someone will ask about the Trinity. How can you still believe in *that*? It's especially problematic for Muslims who view the whole three-in-one-ness of God as complete heresy. So why are we still celebrating Holy Trinity Sunday?

Any talk of a holy trinity today might be more about Durant/Curry/Green the Big 3 of the Golden State Warriors than about Father/Son/Holy Spirit. But actually these three basketball superstars might give us a new and better way to look at an old dusty church doctrine. Well, not *just* Durant, Curry, and Green. Probably most of us are familiar with the term "in the zone." If you play any sports, maybe you've felt that state of consciousness where you're totally focused, nothing exists but you and your performance and you're playing at your absolute best. It's more than just concentration; it's almost a spiritual experience.

*Caddyshack clip*

But not just for athletes. Back in 1990, a professor of psychology published a bestselling book called *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Mee-hi Cheek-sentz-mi- hi-yl) identified flow as a highly focused mental state, in which you're "completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost." Sounds just like being "in the zone," right?

As a reviewer wrote: "You've heard about how a musician loses herself in her music, how a painter becomes one with the process of painting. In work, sport, conversation or hobby, you experience the suspension of time, the freedom of complete absorption in activity. This is 'flow,' an experience that is at once demanding and rewarding - one of the most enjoyable and valuable experiences a person can have."

Did you catch the spiritual reference there? A painter becomes one with the process of painting; a musician becomes one with the music. But how could this oneness possibly have anything to do with the Trinity?

Mention the doctrine of the Trinity and eyes begin to glaze over. But I'm not going to talk about Trinity in the same old way. For too long we've been held hostage by western Christianity's definition of God that's based on outdated Greek philosophy. Now the early church fathers who decided all this (and they were all men) *were* asking the same questions we ask today: who or what is God and how do Jesus and the Holy Spirit fit in? Without going into detail, they used Aristotle's philosophy to explain how there could still be just one God, even with these other characters in play. That's where you get language like "being of one substance with the Father" – pure Aristotle - logical thinking that led into countless explanations of how three could really be one. Which led to other religions like Islam – not buying our ice/water/ steam displays - to call us polytheists. Which led countless Christians to leave the church because they could no longer believe "six impossible things before breakfast."

But not all early Christians went in this direction. There are other ways of believing that have been around from the beginning. For instance, the Cappadocian Fathers of 4<sup>th</sup> century Turkey came to this conclusion: "Whatever is going on in God is a flow, a radical relatedness, a perfect communion between Three—a circle dance of love. And God is not just a dancer; God is the dance itself."

And here's a description of some of the ancient Greek Fathers: they "depict the Trinity as a Round Dance: an event that has continued for six thousand years, and six times six thousand, and beyond the time when humans first knew time. An infinite current of love streams without ceasing, to and fro, to and fro, to and fro: gliding from the Father to the Son, and back to the Father, in one timeless happening. This circular current of trinitarian love continues night and day.... The orderly and rhythmic process of subatomic particles spinning round and round at immense speed echoes its dynamism."

The metaphors of circle and dance and current of love might seem strange to our western ears, but I believe that our emerging awareness of eastern Christianity and other eastern religions is leading us into a better spirituality than we've had before. Millennia before the publication of *Flow*, practitioners Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Sufism were following disciplines to overcome the duality of self and object. We're just catching up.

Father Richard Rohr, author of *The Divine Dance*, is all over this idea of flow. "This God is the very one whom we have named 'Trinity'—the flow who flows through everything, without exception, and who has done so since the beginning. Thus, everything is holy, for those who have learned how to see. The implications of this spiritual paradigm shift, this Trinitarian Revolution, are staggering: every bit of ambition for humanity and the earth, for wholeness and holiness, is the eternally-flowing life of the Trinitarian God."

Now you might be thinking that we're still trying to force God into a 3-part box. Why hang onto Trinity at all? Why not just become Unitarian? But Unitarianism itself came about as a rejection of the Aristotelian definition of Trinity. And we're not even going there anymore.

In a stunning work called *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*, Cynthia Bourgeault, busts open our silly attempts at defining God, at the same time reclaiming Trinity for a new spiritual age. She suggests that the principle of three is actually the operating principle of the universe (present in many religions) and undercuts all of our dualistic thinking (light/dark; heaven/earth; human/divine; male/female, etc.) that holds us back from being fully human.

How to explain this Law of Three? Let's take a very current example. "Our politics have devolved into divisiveness and partisanship. You feel passionate about your party and your issues. Your co-worker or neighbor backs the *other* political party with equal passion. And everything stops right there.

Someone takes position A, and someone else opposes them in Position B; they exist in rivalry and antagonism, world without end. This is precisely what we'd expect in a binary system—a place of “two-ness” in opposition. At best, when we're finished yelling at each other, we might try to compromise and form some kind of synthesis position out of our dueling dualisms. But, if three-ness captures the essence of the cosmos more than two-ness, it means that we can hold our position with complete integrity while awaiting an unexpected third force to arrive and surprise us all out of our neat little boxes. This isn't some mere compromise or synthesis of opposition, but something genuinely new arriving on the scene.

The first and second forces don't suddenly find themselves invalidated in the face of something newer and shinier. Instead, the third force gives everyone a valuable role to play in the creation of something genuinely new—a fourth possibility that becomes the place for our collective creativity to come out and play. The energy isn't in any precise definition of the three persons of the Trinity as much as in the relationship among the Three. This is where all the power for creative renewal is at work: the loving relationship between them; the infinite love between them; the dance itself. In other words, it's an entirely relational universe. When we try to stop this flow moving through, with, and in us, that's when we fall into the state of sin, which is truly a state of being more than just a behavior.

So we want to get with the flow, which is all about creativity, growth, transformation, connection with the Divine and all that is. Sounds good, right? But how do we get into flow? It's like the answer to the question of how to get to Carnegie Hall: practice, practice, practice. Kevin Durant doesn't get in the zone without picking up the ball and shooting over and over. The artist and musician put hard work into their craft before they experience that kind of transcendence. It's the same with spirituality. Although (and this is important) you're already in the flow, you're already part of the divine dance. You don't have to earn your place. But the more awake and alert you are to Divine Presence, the more you'll feel “in the zone.”

What practice? First of all, setting the intention to open your heart and mind. Then, seeking the practice that fits you best. Last week I talked about breath prayer. Or simply the practice quieting the mind in meditation. Finding quiet time. Listening to meditative music. Believe me, I know these things do not come easily or naturally to most of us. That's why intention and practice are key. I also suggest taking a look at Richard Rohr's blog about this:

<https://cac.org/importance-good-theology-2016-09-11/>

Although remember, it's not just about the head knowledge. Reading about flow can be helpful, but ultimately it's all about experiencing it. This exploration of a new way of understanding Trinity isn't just esoteric theological wordplay. It has implications for us today as we ourselves search for ways of understanding who and what God is.

Times are changing. The church is changing. How we define God – or don't define God would be more like it – is changing. Personally, I like the idea of a divine circle dance much better than an image of a triangle. As Rohr says. "Clearly our triune God is a riot of expression, transcending and including any possible labels. And I'm glad to see the hymn that Orion chose for the hymn of the day because it's been in my head all week. I hope that as we sing it, we'll begin to get in the zone, get with the flow and join the dance of Trinity.

Amen

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

*The Genesis reading doesn't directly address the issue of the Trinity, although it does suggest a complexity in God, with the phrase, "Let us make humankind in our image....male and female [God] created them." God is alive, many-faceted, and as wondrously complex as God's creation. This is "our" creation story, our poetry, and needs to be told in light of our understanding of other creation stories and the universe story of today's scientists.*

Video *In The Beginning Part 1: Creation*

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

*The passages represents an early attempts at articulating the Trinity, the wondrous incarnational presence of God. This is not the "threeness" misunderstood by Islam's founders, as separate beings, and thus idolatrous representations of the One God. Instead, it is a unity of the spirit in which, despite the grandeur and infinity of God, the apophatic and "hidden" God, God is one in the Spirit and one in Christ. God's moral nature is unified.*

*It is written . . .*

And now, dear friends, I must say goodbye. Mend your ways. Encourage one another. Live

on harmony and peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send greetings to you.

The grace of our Savior Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Matthew 28:16-20

*Trinity Sunday may be an "era piece," but it may also be a day to celebrate a God who is still creating, who speaks in diverse ways, whose creativity and redemption embraces all creation, and who challenges us to go beyond all divisive and exclusive theologies to affirm the wonders of God's creative love.*

*It is written . . .*

The Eleven made their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had summoned them. At the sight of the risen Christ they fell down in homage, though some doubted what they were seeing. Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words:

"All authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of Abba God (the Father) and of the Only Begotten (Son) and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, even until the end of the world."