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Trinity Sunday
May 18, 2008

The story is told of a theology professor who was teaching a course about the doctrine of the Trinity. After talking for weeks about the three persons in one God. The God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. After talking for weeks about battles fought, kingdoms divided, heretics imprisoned, tortured, exiled and put to death. After talking for weeks about the councils which debated and defined the Trinity, she opened class on the last day of the semester with the following suggestion: If you want my advice, each year when Trinity Sunday comes along, choose one of the following options A: go on vacation. B: invite a guest preacher in for that Sunday. And if all else fails, catch the flu. Do anything you can, she instructed them, to avoid preaching on Trinity Sunday. There was even an extra point question on the final exam asking how one might avoid preaching on Trinity Sunday.

Well, I have to confess in my early years of ministry I tried everything I could to avoid preaching on Trinity Sunday. I scheduled fishing trips, vacations, guest preachers, and yes, even caught the flu to avoid preaching on the Trinity.

Over the past few years however, I came to the startling realization that in fact I enjoyed speaking about the Trinity. I have used all sorts of images to speak of trinity: shamrocks, apples, mirrors, triangles, ice and fire. Once I even used the image of an elephant!!!! None of these images, as entertaining as I thought they were. None I suspect were particularly helpful either.

The best images, the ones that I believe best capture the nature of the Trinity are images that grow out of the mystery of Love.

Trying to explain trinity, is like trying to explain love. Hopefully we all know the experience of loving, the experience of being loved. But, even having had the experience of love, we know that it is almost impossible to put into words. The best words written about love are not to be found in essays of biology, science, psychology or even theology. The best words about love are found in poetry. The mystery of the trinity, like the mystery of love is more poetry than doctrine.

How can one explain the mystery of the love between a newly married husband and wife. They love each other so intensely. Yet, when they become parents, they realize that not only is there space in their love for a child, but, in fact their love for each other deepens. Love between two persons, always reaches out to embrace and love a third. Perhaps that love embraces a child that is conceived, perhaps it embraces a child adopted. Perhaps it embraces a neighbor, or a foster child, or a relative in a nursing home. Perhaps that love embraces a cause. The doctrine of the trinity reveals a mystery that love is only complete when lover and beloved reach out and love outside themselves.

The mystery of Love, like the mystery of God can never be adequately explained or put into words. Love, arises out of and reveals the mystery of the Trinity of God. The Trinity arises out of and reveals the mystery of Love.

The doctrine of the Trinity grew out of the experience of being loved by God. Each Sunday we hear stories of this love in readings from the Hebrew Scripture, the Gospels, and the epistles or letters of the early Christians. These readings record the experience of the steadfast love of God through the centuries. The Hebrew Scriptures recall God's steadfast love for the people of ancient Israel. The Gospels recall God's steadfast love revealed in the person of Jesus. The Epistles recall God's steadfast love abiding through the Holy Spirit after Jesus physically departed from this world. The doctrine of the trinity grew out of the belief that it was the one God who revealed God's love in different

circumstances, in different centuries. Out of these different experiences of the one God, questions arose. How can the one God who is beyond time, exist in time? How can the creator become creature? How can the God who is totally other, become flesh and live among us? How can God be at once so distant from us, and at the same time be so deep within us that he is closer to us than we are to ourselves? How can the source of life, be born? How can the God who is all powerful, set aside that power and suffer? How can the one God who is eternal, come to earth and die? The questions grew out of the experience of God. But, dogmatic, precise explanations and answers all came up short. To explain all they mysteries of God is as impossible as explaining the mystery of love.

At the heart of the Feast of the Trinity, is the mystery of eternal love. The Father pours out her love for the Son, who pours herself in love for the Spirit who pours himself in love for the Father. Love pours loves-self in love to the beloved, who pours herself in love to the lover, who pours himself in love for the beloved. So it has been and so it will be for eternity. Love pouring out love into love. Words fail to contain this mystery. Yet, we believe that as God's creatures, we have been drawn into that relationship of love. The love of the trinity surrounds us, so that all of our life is lived in the mysterious love of God. We exist within the loving relationship of God.

As part of our end of the year celebration this weekend, we will be giving as gifts to teachers, students and all of us, these pencils, recalling the statement of Mother Teresa "I am a pencil in the hand of God". The quote is from a Time magazine article in 1989. Mother Teresa states in that interview: "It is God's work. I am like a little pencil in God's hand. That is all. He does the thinking. He does the writing. The pencil has nothing to do with it. The pencil has only to be) allowed to be used."

I believe it is a fitting gift to us on this Feast of Trinity. God is does the thinking, God does the writing. We are pencils in God's hands.

Think of all the words written through the centuries about God. All of the gods of all religions, of all people in all times and all places. Think of all the words written through the century about the Trinity, about the relationship of the Father to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Think of every word written about the mystery of God that is beyond our understanding. Billions and trillions of words written about God. But, without love, God is not understood. Without love, all these words are nothing but straw. Only in love is the mystery of God revealed.

Our prayer today is that we might allow the mystery of God to be written in our life. May we be pencils in the hand of God. May our all embracing love reveal the love of Father Son and Spirit. May we be pencils in the hands of God, so that through us, she who is Father Son and Spirit might write her love poem to our world.
