



SAINT LUKE'S

TRINITY SUNDAY
YEAR B

ISAIAH 6:1-8
ROMANS 8:12-17
JOHN 3:1-17
PSALM 29

A SERMON BY THE REV. BO REYNOLDS

MAY 27, 2018

At the very end of his journey through the afterlife, after narrowly escaping the nine circles of Hell and ascending up, up the mountain of Purgatory into Paradise, Dante Alighieri completes his Divine Comedy with his experience of the Trinity. He's just passed through the nine spheres of Paradise and his guide for this portion of this journey, St Bernard, prays to the Virgin Mary on his behalf. The poet finds the fullness of the Triune God manifested before his very eyes and he describes his vision of the Trinity this way:

“In the deep and bright essence of that exalted Light, three
circles
appeared to me; they had three different colors,
but all of them were of the same dimension;
one circle seemed reflected by the second,
as rainbow is by rainbow, and the third
seemed fire breathed equally by those two
circles.” (*Paradiso*, 33, 112-120)

As Dante enters further into direct contemplation of this completely revealed Divinity, his powers of speech and description begin to fail him, in his words, reducing his language to the ‘babbling of a child’. But in the final lines of the poem, Dante experiences the total alignment of his will and mind with the will of God and he closes out his epic with these words:

"But already my desire and my will
were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed,

by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars." (*Paradiso* 33, 142-145)

The Love which moves the Sun and the other stars.

The doctrine of the Trinity places Love, Divine Love, as the Primary Foundation for the very existence of our universe. Because the very nature of God is the self-emptying, all encompassing Love shared between the three distinct and yet inseparable members of the Trinity, the very universe is *charged* by love. Love, as articulated in the Divine Comedy, is kinetic and active. The Love between the members of the Trinity, in Dante's rendering, literally drives the motion of the universe itself like a wheel. This stands in stark contrast to his depiction of Lucifer, a grotesque but pathetic figure, trapped eternally in ice, static and ultimately powerless. The being furthest from the Heart of God is devoid of life and motion, lacks agency in God's order.

Yet when we say that common refrain "God is Love", what we often mean to say is that 'God Loves X, Y, or Z'. The mystery of the Trinity refocuses our gaze: Love is, ultimately, not an emotion or a feeling, not a sentiment, but an active, kinetic, and ongoing process.

We have heard clearly the last few weeks from the first letter of John that our ability to love God is inextricably linked to the love that we extend to one another: "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

The Trinity itself is community comprised of three members who

eternally step towards one another in the spirit of self-offering borne of love. Their love is so total and all encompassing, so timelessly offered and completely accepted, that they are indivisibly bound together; the love between the members of the Trinity is the stuff of God itself. This Love shared between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit reminds us of what I stated a few weeks back, when we read Jesus' teaching on bearing fruit and remaining in relationship to him as the Vine: Christianity is not a faith about *doing*, it is a faith about *becoming*.

The Love of God is not only a series of caring actions but a process of living Life itself. This is what is meant when Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of being born of the Spirit: By embodying the self-offering Love of the Trinity within our own lives, we are drawn into a higher Life; the Divine Life! Our daily actions can be enlivened by the very Spirit of God to become something much greater than we could ever hope for. By practicing this singularly Divine action of self-offering, we become an icon of, a window *into*, the love of the Trinity which formed us. Every interaction with others that we have has the potential to become an extension of divine grace.

But, please, in hearing me, do not reduce the essence of this message down to a trite aphorism about the need to be nice and pleasant to one another, to smile passingly at your neighbor as they walk their dog, to do the dishes after dinner even though it is not your turn to do them. Truly embodying the Love of God in your life will break your heart at times, cause you to rethink your notions of what Love truly is at times, even challenge your notions of what is right or just.

It will ask for all of you and then some more, and then, only when you feel that you have been poured out like water, will you find a deeper fullness of life. This is what Paul tells us in Philippians, as he provides the very blueprint to modelling the Love of the Trinity in our own hearts:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross...Therefore God also highly exalted him...”

You say *Father, well yeah, but that's Jesus....*and I remind you of Fr William's sermon on the Feast of the Ascension: That Christ was born, lived, died, rose, and ascended that we too might live a Life transformed by the power of Divine Love; that we too might be faithful witnesses to the Love of God for all people.

Sometimes Divine Love will require us to sacrifice our sense of control, of having the right thing to say all times, and simply sit in silence and pain with another person. Sometimes Divine Love will draw us into responding to the needs of the poor or of refugees by willingly sacrificing some comfort or sense of self-preservation or possession. Sometimes Divine Love will ask us to lay aside that which is rightfully ours for the need of the other.

Dostoevsky warns in *The Brothers Karamazov* that “Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to Love in dreams.” But having recently completed our Lenten journey, are we not a body of people who see this most clearly in Our Savior, broken and poured out for Love? And, having just completed our Easter journey, are we not a body of people who have seen the triumphant power of self-sacrificial Love in our own lives and communities?

May God grant us the eyes to see where in our own lives we might practice this Divine self-offering.

May God grant us the courage to Love even when it requires all that we have.

And may the Love which moves the Sun and the other stars continually draw us ever closer to the Heart of God.

AMEN.

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