

Trinity Sunday
June 3, 2007

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Scriptures: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

Today we observe Trinity Sunday. This is the day we take to celebrate/observe the doctrine of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or perhaps more usefully, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. And I think, after all these years, I have finally figured out the nature of my personal un-ease with this day. The very concept of Trinitarian doctrine presumes to have figured out how to explain/describe God. To me, it smacks of acting as if we have figured out what to put on the label on the box that God fits into (a unique three-sided box to be sure).

If anything, we ought to be taking a day to bust open all the boxes we try to fit God into. And maybe, at its core, that was the point of the doctrine, that God doesn't fit into any one box, any one category, or one description. But, the fact of the matter is that humans have a terrible habit of trying to fit God into our categories, our capacity to understand.

We tend to domesticate God, making God all so friendly and personal that we forget the terrible majesty of this being who created the universe, conquered sin and death, and sustains life. God is bigger than our capacity even to imagine. For us to try to contemplate God is like asking a drop of water to contemplate the sea. (which is not a bad analogy actually in terms of God as the One in whom we live and move and have our being.)

About this point, my scientific mind started thinking analogies and the water cycle and a drop of water leaving the ocean and going out into the world and falling back to earth and going back to the ocean. Or water in three phases, ice, liquid and steam. And then I realized I was doing exactly what I think ought not be done. See how easy it is.

I guess the things that I am willing to struggle with are the more immediate questions, the more day-to-day matters of God, like God's love for us, God's promises to us, and God's call on our lives, and how we do or don't respond to those things.

I prefer to start with the point of how big God is, how infinite is God's love and forgiveness, how profound is God's ability to create, redeem and sustain. I prefer to contemplate how it is that God is at work in us, with us, through us. That has to mean that since we have been given the Holy Spirit in our baptism, we have been given something beyond our imagining. If God's love is in us, then we have a capacity to show love beyond our imagining. If God's power to redeem is in us, that we have a capacity to bring about change for the good of the world that is beyond our imagining. If God's power to sustain life is in us, that we are part of that in ways we likely never realize.

Every now and again a person comes along who God works through in an especially powerful and surprising way. In those moments we see what God can do through unlikely folks, usually folks not that different from us. I usually don't spend much time on the observances that are noted in the bulletin, but today is the observance of the life of Pope John 23rd, who is one such person. He was elected pope and expected to be just a

caretaker, not doing anything particularly important or progressive. Instead, in his short tenure, he called the Second Vatican Council and initiated reform in almost every area of the life of the church, not the least of which was the impetus for the ecumenical movement that continues to this day.

Others like that come to mind: Oscar Romero, also a bookish scholarly type, expected to do nothing to rock the boat in strife-torn El Salvador. Instead he stood up to speak truth to power and helped bring justice to the oppressed in his homeland. Oskar Schindler during World War II, Paul Rusesabagina in Rwanda, And those are just the ones well enough known to have had a movie made of their lives. There are such stories, known and unknown, throughout all of history, of those who allowed the Holy Spirit to move them past their own fears and insecurities in order to be an instrument for justice, peace, survival, and ultimately, reconciliation.

In all these people, caught up in something larger than themselves, we see that God was at work in them, with them, through them. This has been true of followers of God in every age.

One of my favorite quotes, that I can't find the exact text for, says something to the effect of, we do not give any glory to God by insisting on the things we cannot do. That so sells God short. When we insist on what we cannot do, we are in effect suggesting what God can not do. I suspect that if you really want to see what you can do, or more precisely, see what God can do through you, all you have to do is get in the groove with what God wants to do: things like feeding the hungry, caring for the poor and persecuted, tending the widow and orphan, working for peace and justice. That was what John 23rd did, and Oscar Romero, and Schindler. It is what we are all called to do, collectively here at Emanuel, and individually, in whatever places our lives take us.

Speaking of Emanuel for just a moment: we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel with this construction project. It is beginning to be time to ask what comes next for us, how shall we use the space that we have for the sake of the community, for the sake of the world. It is not who we are to let perfectly usable facilities set empty six days a week. The time will come when we will need to be open to God's work in us, with us, through us, in new ways.

What will that look like in 2007, 2008, and beyond? What doors will God open? What connections will happen to happen? And will we be able to let the Holy Spirit move us past our fears and insecurities for the sake of the world once again? May the One who created the universe, conquered sin and death, and sustains all life so work in us that all may come to know this God who is beyond imagining, and whose love and forgiveness is beyond comprehension. Amen.