

Texts: Matthew 28:16-20, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Today is Trinity Sunday in the Christian calendar. It follows Pentecost Sunday, the day when we recall the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church, recorded in Acts 2. With the gift of the Spirit, all three persons of the Trinity have been liturgically celebrated in the Christian year, which began on the First Day of Advent. We began with the word of the Creator, preparing for the Savior, through Advent, revealed at Christmas. The earthly life of Jesus brought us through Epiphany, Lent, and Easter. The Easter season ends at Pentecost; the season of Pentecost will last through the 52<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, Christ the King, before Advent begins the cycle again.

Trinity is not recorded in the Bible; it is a concept that was developed later by the church. There are suggestions of Trinity – God in three persons – written in the Old and New Testament, upon which the concept is based. This morning, we read two such texts: the final verses of a gospel, Matthew, and the final verses of one of the letters of Paul, 2 Corinthians.

I don't think it is just a coincidence that Trinitarian expressions – Creator, Savior, Spirit – are found at the end of these two books. Final words, concluding remarks, make an impact. Final words are often filled with great meaning; fitting conclusions from what has gone before are derived.

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Notice: not names, but baptized in the name. One single name for three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Three person relationships can be tricky; triads are challenging. It is easy to play two against one, pick a favorite. “How come Jesus gets to sit at your right hand?” I grew up in a three-child family; with my brother, two years older, and my sister, eight years younger. One might think that the two older boys would gang up against the lone, much younger, girl in our family. But being so much different than my brother, and having always enjoyed younger children, my sister and I were close. The three of us, were never really tight, as a unit.

God in three persons; one name. To me, it says a lot about how important relationships are with God, and in God: this not a lone, solitary God. What matters more to the God of the Bible than right relationship? Righteousness. Justice. Keeping faith, trust. Love God. Love neighbor, like self. NO exclusions, not for the poor, widows, orphans, immigrants, lepers, prostitutes, sinners, or the dead, the half dead man on the side of the road, the Samaritan woman. Right relationship, with love as number one priority. The three in one, within the Trinity, model that, teach that, enable that, and insist on it in us: love, peace, harmony, forgiveness, mercy. We are baptized in this name.

At the ends of our stories, as we draw conclusions and derive meaning from what we've learned, it appears what matters most is about love. About right relationships. The gift of peace, the grace of kindness. Getting past ourselves. Letting go of relationship-

damaging stuff and embracing life-giving stuff. How strong, unshakable bonds with one another guide us through life's worst storms. The Holy Trinity; now they've been through some storms together! Still tight. We could learn a lot about love from the Creator, Savior, Spirit. We are baptized in their name.

In Second Corinthians, Paul concludes a tumultuous, heart-rendering letter to a church in conflict by getting down to brass tacks. He speaks in Trinitarian terms, way before its time. It's almost like Paul finds a window into the divine interplay between the three.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, good-bye. Put things in order, respond to my encouragement, be in harmony with each other, and live in peace – and the God of love and peace will be with you." Right relationship welcomes God: the God of love and peace. Greet one another with a holy embrace or a holy kiss. (Makes me wonder how the persons of the Trinity greet one another; it may be more tender, more intimate than we can imagine. I love watching couples who've been married a long time, still holding hands, showing tender affection. Love endures.) All of God's people greet you, Paul writes – still linked, keeping close, in spite the miles, or differences, or time.

Finally: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Paul peers inside the Trinity window. I often close our worship with Eugene Peterson's words for this verse: "The amazing grace of the Master Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." At the end, what is left to say? Grace, amazing grace. Love, extravagant, good, and plenty. Friendship, our dependable holy companion. Emanating from the three and revealing God. For everyone. Everywhere. Ever present. The blessing will hold, the gifts will last: Jesus gracing, God loving, the Holy Spirit close by.

I peered inside Paul's window this week at VBS: I saw God's love, right relationship revealed. During recreation one morning, the kids were divided into two teams. Queen Esther was our hero that day. Each team selected an Esther who was to be dressed by her teammates in a royal gown, a tiara, a ring, and multiple beaded necklaces. One team member at a time would run up to their team's Esther, select an adornment, only one, and then run back so the next team member could do the same. The kids, who spanned about a ten-year age range, were ready and eager and off they went. One of the teams had little Luna as a teammate. She was our youngest child, and she is very secure being her true four-year-old self. Luna slowly walked up to her team's Esther, carefully selected one of the pretty beaded necklaces, and put it on herself. Some of us adults encouraged her to put an item on the queen, which she did, with great care, then she meandered back to her place in line. While the other team raced and quickly finished adorning their queen. You know how kids can be. Each round, a different child would be Esther, each team adorned him or her, and Luna always felt quite comfortable, secure, and fully accepted being Luna. There was not one taunt from her teammates, no frustration voiced, no resentment shown. All I saw was patience, harmony, smiles, love. It's not only couples married 60 or 70 years, who know about love.

Amazing grace. Extravagant love. Intimate friendship. Creator, Savior, Spirit: the God of love and peace will be with you.