

Sunday 4 June 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Trinity Sunday/Peace with Justice Sunday

Scriptures: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalter UMH 743 (response 1) Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13;

Matthew 28:16-20

“Resurrection”

Trinity Sunday, and Peace with Justice Sunday!

What an overload!

Just sitting still together and thinking would be enough on these two topics!

The doctrine of the Trinity has been a bugaboo for lots of people as long as it's been around, which is from the fourth or fifth century A.D.

Remember: the first serious, highly educated, systematic thinkers of Christianity were Greeks, and like the sermon in the Book of Acts Paul preached to them, it shows more mental than emotional tone.

Greeks went far in this direction, and we're still that way in modern science and politics, to a great degree. So there's no profit in skipping this final Sunday in the post-Easter season, which I've kept calling a time of learning each year what CELEBRATING means in Christianity. But it does seem like saying, “I believe in the Trinity” needs some softening up and warming up, if it's truly going to help us learn more and more about being grateful, and creatively merciful, which is how I think of celebrating as Jesus people.

So, let me specify what saying “God in three persons” means, to me.

First, look at the scriptures a huge body of Christians have selected for today. A long description of the whole world, from the beginning, starts the Bible's first book. Reality was formless, and void, and God created the whole world, called it good, and declared one out of every seven days was to be time off, resting and celebrating. We're not anywhere near as good at that as my grandparents' generation, as far as I can see, as I go to the store at 9:30 p.m. any day, much less Sunday! Then Psalm 8: Humans are a little lower than the angels ... and their chief job is to celebrate and enjoy and be creative with God's creation. How're we doing at that?

Seems to me we've pretty much defined being human as celebrating, in these two readings. That means a big part of everything we've anything to do with is neither selfish nor destructive. Period. So a big part of being Jesus people is confession, isn't it? ... It's facing that not just the rest of humanity, but the part calling itself Christian is way, way off course. Isn't that what you get?

Going on, the third text, from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, gets really short and simple.

What it comes to is human relations. Love and honor each other. Period. How far off have we gone from that? That's creedal, don't you think? That's "the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God."

Finally, for the Gospel, Matthew tells a Jewish story about Jesus. That's pretty much what Matthew does all through his one book; and you know, it's thought-provoking that the church puts Matthew first among the Gospels, building the blood-line for Jesus, and revving up the anti-semitism-potential for Christians; as we know the Church has done for 2,000 years. Matthew, like John, is extremely critical of the Jews because so many of them didn't convert. Put that aside for a minute as we get literal about OUR history and see Jesus fulfilling his promise to meet the apostles in Jerusalem and instruct them on humanity's future. Here we've crammed the whole idea of a Holy Spirit and a risen Son into just a few last verses, to complete the Trinity. Jesus, the risen Son, fulfills his promise to meet them in Jerusalem ... and most of them, moved by the Holy Spirit, worship him.

I'd say Christianity is still about one God, if you look at the evidence here. Wouldn't you?

I'd say the Trinity tantalizes us with the power of Spirit, and the power of one Son, which we know about when we talk to Jesus in our prayers, and when we believe we humans can be so God-like in our handling of creation and our relating to one another. I'd say it's incredible to experience God at work in ourselves and with each other like we Wesleyans do when we say we're here to transform the world. I'd say Peace with Justice Sunday talks like that about humankind's possibility, when we allow God's power to take over our aims. I'd say Trinity runs short of evidence by seeming to make Father, Son, and Holy Spirit equal, as it tries to get across the hope the early Christians experienced in Jesus, both before and after his death.

I'd say, in sum, that **resurrection** takes over the calm, sensible, balanced attitude of the Greeks with some incredible Jewish enthusiasm. Who else but Jews would dare to sweep aside all the power of other divinities, like the Genesis story of creation does? Who else would dare to say God would choose one people and through them straighten the whole of human society and history? Incredibly egotistical Jews! And at the same time be as candid about human orneriness as the Hebrew God is, right from the beginning?

There is, in other words, no way to separate the Old Testament from the New Testament. The doctrine of the Trinity is only useful if the earthiness of God is acknowledged, like Genesis does.

Until we believe God is so intent on having companions, and so foolish as to suffer for it... so lonesome and awesome at the same time ... so creative as to allow Satan and to keep Satan until .. somehow ... do you think ... to watch and wait for himSATAN... until he finally converts? finally

I don't know. I do know that your resurrection and mine, just like Jesus', is a lot more than just something up ahead. Maybe the better word is "transformation" ... although transformation doesn't seem as amazing as resurrection. When I finally get over some sin, some mistaken

idea or behavior, or see that happening in someone else, or in some national turn-around or some medical rescue miracle, like my friend who told me yesterday of being able to see perfectly after nearing going blind ... or, say, when I see something as miraculous as the CoVid vaccine, developed as quickly as it was, and becoming as miraculous as compared to the Black Plague in Europe centuries ago ... or the so-called Spanish Influenza in 1918... it seems like "resurrection" is the most appropriate word.

I don't know ... I just think Peace with Justice Sunday this year does something Trinity Sunday needs. I need something inspirational after voting to split off 23 churches over LGBTQ matters at Annual Conference last Thursday. I need something to inspire me to believe we can avoid blowing ourselves off the face of the earth with atomic energy. I need something to describe the rejuvenation I experience over and over in my own thinking and behavior, through Jesus Christ, with you all as my sisters and brothers in his name.

Resurrection!

Here and now!

Over and over! From death into life.

Amen.