

Trinity Sunday, 4 June 2023
Saint Aidan's Episcopal Church, Portland OR
The Rev'd Canon Raggs Ragan, Interim Rector

In the name of God, our love, our life, and our hope. Amen.

Welcome to Trinity Sunday. You already know that I am an anomaly among preachers in my love of talking about the Trinity. Those who do not like preaching about it generally object to preaching about doctrine, about intellectual concepts, rather than about our lives and hearts. I like it because to me it means preaching about our experience of life, of the divine in all its beauty and complexity.

You may remember my summary statement about what the Trinity doctrine tells us about God: "God is complicated." God is vast beyond our imaginings and our thinking, infinite in fact, which means there is room in God for everything we are or need.

For today's handout I have provided a lovely meditation on Rublëv's Trinity Icon, which is on the front of your bulletin and in front of the altar this morning. It is telling that the handout is not a treatise or an essay, but a guided meditation. The idea of the Trinity is an expression of people's experience of the divine, and an invitation to explore that experience.

I remember about 10 years ago sitting with a visitor who dropped in to my church office to talk and began by saying, "You know, a lot of people are Jesus Christians; I am a Holy Spirit Christian." She was not saying that they believed in different ideas of God or belonged to different faith traditions, but that their experiences were different, that she best understood God, felt God, could converse with God, with the aid of the ideas clustering around God the Holy Spirit. By her definitions, I am probably a Holy Spirit Christian as well and we had a great time, recommending books and writers to each other and talking about our ideas and experiences.

That conversation led me to think of the capaciousness of God. God is not only complicated; God is huge, another aspect of God's infinity. There is room enough for everyone and everything: my ideas and yours; my experience and yours; my suffering and yours, all wrapped up in love and inclusion. Think of John's lovely line about there being many dwelling places in God's house – room and rooms for all of us.

People who object to talking about the Trinity tend to see it as requiring dry intellectual exposition, but I see it as an invitation to art, an invitation to use all our senses and all our faculties to experience the divine and to share that experience with one another.

Our first reading today was even longer than all those long passages from John in this year's lectionary. You noticed that we did something unusual with it (an idea I found in someone's suggestions for the Easter Vigil) – we heard it read in two alternating voices. To me that gives a different way to experience it – a way that fits with this idea of the Trinity as expressing the limitless embrace of God.

"*Bereshith*" "In the beginning" That meditation put by the priests who assembled the Pentateuch, those first five books of Hebrew Scripture, is obviously not meant to be a scientific treatise, but a basking in the wonder of creation as it unfolded, breathed and blessed into being by the divine. It makes me think of all those ever more wonderful images of the cosmos from our space telescopes – wonder following wonder in ever expanding beauty. Of course there is not just one voice, as there is not just one color or shape.

If one takes away nothing else from that long reading, I think one should be left with a sense of primal goodness, primal rejoicing, primal blessing. Our tradition has a deeply rooted sense of the power of language, which runs from the beginning of Hebrew Scripture through the centuries of Christian theologizing. In the beginning was the Word. There is the sense of God speaking everything that is into being, that the mind of God gives being and then life to everything that is. And then we have God's reaction, God's word about everything: "*Qitov*. It is good." So the ultimate word about everything, then, now, and always, is 'Good' – and ultimately 'Very good.'

We see in this creation narrative a sense that everything that is has burst forth from the loving heart of God and is forever embraced in that heart. It may challenge us to think of the corona virus, or the latest mass murderer, or the person who is always cruel as loved by God – but that is what we see here. Everything that is is created and embraced by God, including you and me. And we are invited to experience life that way, in my favorite summary of the Gospel, "There is no 'them', only 'us'.

Another aspect of this way of understanding God as Triune, a unity which is also a trinity, is as a dance. As I said, I find that talk of the Trinity invites art more than discourse.

Starting in the late fourth century, you can in fact find learned discourses about περιχορησις, a Greek word that might be translated ‘dancing around’. The idea is that the three persons of the Trinity are distinct but completely connected and in ever changing relationship which never disconnects. You have probably seen the symbol for this that shows up a lot in church architecture. *[show picture]* I have made a few copies of this as well for those among you who like to meditate by coloring.

This is a very dynamic way of thinking about the Trinity, which fits very much with the creation description at the beginning of Genesis – continual movement, total interconnection, in the dance of life and love.

This image is also very invitational. We are invited to join in the dance. Rublëv’s ikon is an extremely still image of the same idea. This time we have human images and they are seated – but at the same time there is clearly relationship among the three, as well as openness, a place at the table for us, always open and inviting us into the relationship.

This way of contemplating the Trinity does invite our minds to think complicated and challenging thoughts, but more than that it invites our hearts and eyes to open to the world. It invites participation in the dance, as well as gazing in awe and wonder, seeing how ‘very good’ it all is.

This way of regarding God as complex and infinite invites different ways of experiencing the divine and experiencing the world; it assures everyone of welcome. I would maintain that it does not admit exclusion. Of course we know that from its first expression this idea has aroused controversy and it has been a criterion for exclusion. We read very unedifying descriptions of people beating one another up at the early Church Councils over disagreements about what these ideas mean. But if at the heart of this is the idea that there is no ‘them’; there is no enemy; that all are embraced in the infinite dancing love of the Divine, then the one thing that is not invited is exclusion. It can be hard to hold our arms open when opponents want to exclude us or persecute us because of what we believe. But it is what we are called to do. It is what Jesus is doing on the cross, holding his arms out to everyone, including the ones who killed him. Infinite dance. Infinite inclusion. Infinite embrace. What could be better than that?!

So I invite you to try out the meditation on the ikon in the handout – or to listen to inspiring music – or to gaze at any of the growing number of astonishing images of the expanding universe on the web. And to join God in affirming it all, because Love created it all and invites us into the heart of Love that holds it all in being. We are part of this great blessing – and it is indeed ‘very good!’ Amen.