

CIRCLE OF LOVE

Text: Psalm 8

June 4, 2023 (Trinity Sunday)

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A man went to worship only one Sunday a year. It was on Trinity Sunday. One person in the congregation was really curious about his practice. After several years, he asked the man; “Why do you only come this one Sunday.” The man grinned. He replied. “Oh, that’s easy. I like to come on this day so I can hear the preacher get all tangled up trying to explain the Trinity!”

One can get “*tangled up*” trying to explain this doctrine. The word Trinity isn’t even in the Bible. “*Father, Son and Holy Spirit*” appears only twice. Yet, the theology of the Trinitarian God is found throughout the Old and New Testaments. It’s an essential part of Christian faith. Historically people were killed for not believing it. It used to be a whole season in the Church year. Today many Churches just ignore it. As one pastor said: “*Trinity Sunday is too confusing and complicated. It’s a good day to call in sick!*” (Or bring in a guest preacher!)

If you’re like most United Methodists, you probably haven’t thought much about this doctrine. It’s “*for the theologians*”. It’s too complicated and complex. Is it even relevant or still needed? My answer is unequivocally, “**Yes!!**”. The Trinity offers a truth that’s more and more necessary for us to hear. It helps us understand who God is and what that means for how we live. It’s a word for our life together. The Trinity describes a “*circle of love*” and how it holds us all.

Our text this morning is Psalm 8. It’s the one designated in our lectionary to mark this day. Psalm 8 is “*doxology*”. It’s a song of praise. It celebrates how great and wonderful God is. It witnesses to God’s glory and power. It begins and ends saying, “*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*”

The psalmist doesn’t explain or define God. He gives thanks for what God has done and who God is. He rejoices in the relationship between God the Creator and God’s creations, especially humankind. He celebrates God’s marvelous works naming them with awe and wonder. In doing so, he lifts up the mystery of God; a mystery beyond our ability to contain or dissect. God is “*so much more*” than we can say, so much bigger than our “*word-boxes*”, so much larger than our definitions. Father Richard Rohr puts it this way: “*I see mystery not as something you cannot understand; rather, it is something that you can endlessly understand! There is no point at which you can say, “I’ve got it.” Always and forever, mystery gets you! In*

the same way, you don't hold God in your pocket; rather, God holds you and knows your deepest identity."

He adds: *"When we describe God, we can only use similes, analogies, and metaphors. All theological language is an approximation, offered tentatively in holy awe. We can say, "It's like..." or "It's similar to..."; but we can never say with absolute certainty, "It is..." because we are in the realm of beyond, of transcendence, of mystery. We absolutely must maintain humility before the Great Mystery; otherwise, religion worships itself and its formulations instead of God.*

The Trinity continually stretches our understanding of God. It keeps us from confining God in images that are too small, too comprehensible, and too limited. It keeps us from reducing God to something we can measure, predict, and handle. *"O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"*

The psalmist then asks, *"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"* We're still figuring out the answer to that question. It's not about whether or not God exists. It's a question of whether or why God cares that we exist. Why should God bother with us or about us? **God does.** That's our faith. There we find comfort and hope.

Author Sue Monk Kidd was pregnant with her second child. Her three-year-old son, Bob, was afraid of the dark. Sue tried everything. She left a light on in the hall and put a night-light in his room. Nothing helped. He was still scared. He'd cry out in the middle of the night. One night as she held him against her to comfort him, he touched her belly. He asked, "Mama, is it dark inside there where my little brother is?" He was convinced his yet unborn sister would be a boy.

"Yes", Sue replied, "It's dark in there". Bob then asked, "He doesn't even have a night-light, does he?" "No", she said. Bob hugged his mother. "Do you think my brother is scared all by himself in there?" "I don't think so," Sue responded, "because he's not really alone. He's inside of me".

Suddenly Sue had an inspiration. "It's the same way with you. When it's dark and you think you're all by yourself, you really aren't. I carry you inside me too. Right here in my heart". She looked into his eyes, wondering if he understood. Bob went back to bed and was soon asleep. It was the last time he woke up during the night scared.

*Reflecting on that moment, Sue wrote: "First God was only 'up there'. Then God was 'all around'. Next, I began to see that God was also 'within me'. And now, most shocking of all, I was finding that **I am and always was 'within God'.**"*

We're *"within God"*. We're carried in God's heart. In the dark we're not abandoned. We don't need to be afraid. The circle of love embracing all creation

embraces us also; collectively and individually. We can't fully understand God, God fully understands us. God who is so majestic and transcendent, so far beyond us, is also as close as our next breath.

The Trinity brings that reminder. It awes and comforts us. That's its first gift. God is "*mindful*" of us. God knows us. God loves us. God is with us: now and forever. We're to be "*mindful*" also. That's the second reason this day is needed. It's a call to look to our relationships. God is "*mindful of us*". We're called to be "*mindful*" also; to see "*God within*" others and "*within*" the world. God cares. We are to also. **The God with us becomes the God others see in us.**

A daughter was trying to introduce her elderly mother to the wonders of the Internet. She went to the Web site, "Ask.com." She told her mother it could answer any of her questions. Her mother looked skeptical. "It's true, Mom," she said. "Think of something to ask and it will have the answer." They sat quietly a few moments. Then in a serious voice, her mother asked, "How is Aunt Helen feeling?"

Ask.com doesn't know how Aunt Helen is feeling. God does. God expects us to know also. If we don't know, we're to ask Aunt Helen.

Separation from God, self, others, and creation isn't what God intends. The Bible has a name for it: **Sin**. The Trinity challenges our "*apartness*"; our "*us-them*" view of life. It invites us to deepen our relationship with God. It calls us to see ourselves as precious beloved children of God and to see others that way also. It calls us to make whole our relationships at all levels of life. It's a demand for justice and compassion. It invites us to fulfill our role as caretakers and stewards of God's earth and its creatures; to cherish and respect all life. It moves us beyond words and prayers to actions that make those things possible.

Our lives, our world, our community; the church in all its forms, is broken in many ways. There's evidence of it daily. We see it in acts of hate and violence. We see it in shootings and the burying of the innocent. We see it in the hatred and disrespect we show to those different from us. We see it in the "*isms*" and phobias that cause us to label and demonize others. We see it in the church which locally, globally, and denominationally so often preaches one thing and lives another. When we take seriously what the Trinity shows us, we're challenged and confronted. The heart of the universe is relational, God's love is an expansive embrace of all. We step into that embrace. We reach out our arms to include all our brothers and sisters.

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward was a speaker at Annual Conference many years ago. She told us about her grandfather's table at the family farm. They'd always

gather around it when they came to visit. As the family grew and more friends were added, so were more leaves and more chairs. As the need grew even larger, her grandfather laid a piece of plywood over the top so that still more persons could sit around it. Grandfather's table was always expanding. He'd make room for everyone.

I recently saw a profound and moving illustration of that truth. As C-J told you last week, she and I have recently become ardent fans of the TV show Ted Lasso. Several friends had previously encouraged me to watch the show. While I was recovering from surgery with little to do, C-J (who was "Mommy-sitting") and I started watching it. Now if you had told me I would rave about a show based on British soccer teams, it's staff and coaches, and much "less than polite language", I would have shaken my head. That night did it. We were hooked.

This particular episode was a Christmas one. It's in the second season and a Spirit (dare we say Holy Spirit) has been moving among the team and coaches. They're discovering new truths about themselves and others. Coach Lasso, recently divorced, is facing his first Christmas alone. His boss is also on her own. Her assistant a happily married man and father of three opens his home each year to team members who have nowhere else to go. Usually, two people show up. This time, one by one, two by two, in groups of three and four almost all the Teams member arrive at the Higgin's house. They bring gifts of wine and food. The house gets fuller and fuller. "Where will we sit them all?" his wife asks. "We'll manage" he replies. It comes time to eat. Higgin's small dining table has expanded. It now includes another round table, an ironing board, a pool table and an assortment of chairs. They're all gathered around it. The camera slowly moves down the long table. Speaking different languages, representing different cultures and faiths, sharing different food, with different colored faces and bringing different gifts; they have in that moment become family. Love embraces them all. It's a Communion meal if ever there was one.

Suddenly music draws them outside. There is Ted, his boss, and several musicians they've picked up along the way. In the next moment the street is filled with song, dance and the joyous sounds of community. Where there was separation there is connection. Where they was despair there is joy. It's the kingdom of God made visible.

I invite you to bring that image with you to the Communion Table this morning. This Table draws no lines. It sets no conditions, save a desire to know God, love God and love others. This Table knows no gender, sexual identity, political affiliation or country of birth. At this Table all are held tightly and forever in an unbroken "*circle of love*". Come then in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.