

## **Peachland United Church - June 12, 2022 - Trinity Sunday**

Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5a; John 3:1-2; John 13:34; John 16:7, 12-14

When we sang the processional hymn this morning and came to the lines,  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in Three Persons blessed Trinity. (VU 315)

Is this just nothing but a bunch of “religious abracadabra”, this business about ‘God is three and God is one!’ Remember just here we that Christianity is rooted in Hebrew soil. The distinctive feature about the Jew was the Jew’s passionate belief in the oneness of God. While all around him, his neighbours flitted from one God to another, the Jew, at every synagogue service, recited the Shema; “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord...” (Deut. 6:4) One Lord! It would have been blasphemy for these Hebrew followers of Jesus to deny or abandon their belief in the oneness of God!

But then they had to reckon with something new -- a man who was bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh. They called him the Rabbi. But that category couldn’t encompass Jesus, couldn’t hold him. He kept breaking that category. The words of Nicodemus illustrate the puzzle facing the Jews: “No one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with Him” (John 3:2). People were shaking their heads in amazement, for something was happening at the very core of their existence. He would say, “Your sins are forgiven”, and a strange peace would grip their hearts. When he taught, his words had the compelling ring of truth to them, so much so that his disciple would swear, “Even if it means dying with you, I will never disown you” (Matt. 26:35). There were times when he touched a life, and that life became whole again (Mark 5:41). A verse from Luke’s Gospel illustrates the crisis of decision into which Jesus’ fellow Jews were plunged:

“They were frightened and bewildered and kept saying to one another: Who ever can this be? He gives orders even to the winds and waters and they obey him?”

Saul, the Hebrew pharisee, answered the question as well as anyone when he stopped spitting out curses and instead confessed: “God was in Christ...” (2 Cor. 5:19)

One God and yet, somehow, present in the man Jesus. But that wasn’t all. They had hardly absorbed the claims of Jesus when another factor emerged. This man Jesus talked gently about “Going away” (John 16:7), and about how that “Going Away” would be advantageous to his followers. It would open a new way for God being present -- present as the Spirit -- a presence that would be invisible as the wind is invisible, something that a news reporter’s camera could not pick up on film; but a presence that could be as powerfully felt, as the wind of the desert storm can be felt.

It was this experience of God that came out of the life of common, ordinary Jews such as Martha, Mary and Peter that presents the base for the concept of the Trinity. On the basis of their experience, they knew they would not say all that they meant by “GOD” unless they said the Creator, Redeemer, and the Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity came years later as an attempt to conceptualize, to explain in theological formula, what was the common experience of the ordinary Christian.

Now I wonder if many of us get into trouble with the concept of the Trinity because we make it mathematics, applying arithmetical notions to the being of God. We start adding it up:  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ . That’s simple math. How, as the theologians insist, can  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ ?

Now I would like each of you to take a look at yourself and how you are perceived by various people. Each of us are one person. To you parents you are a son or a daughter. Your way of being yours towards them is quite different from other roles. If you have a significant other the way of being is quite different than your role as a child to your parents. If you have children, they then you are a mother or a father. If you are in a choir, your way of being yourself towards them is quite different again. The list goes on - church member, member of a club, your occupation, and on and on. Your role in each of these situations are quite different. One person, but with very different ways of being yourself. Different ways of being oneself!

That, as a matter of fact, was the meaning of the word “person”, or “persona” in the Latin, back when the Church was formulating its statements on the Trinity as “God in Three Persons”. “Persona” did not refer to separate individuals. But rather to the role or parts an actor played. Hence, as Karl Barth reminds us, the word “person” refers, not to separate individuals, but to the different ways an individual has of being herself, or himself, refers to his or her varying roles.

Every time, therefore, we hear the phrase, “God in three persons”, we ought to translate, not three individuals, for that would be pagan, but rather the One God, who has different ways of being God’s self: the one who creates, the one who redeems, the one who is present as the unseen Spirit.

Let’s move our thinking one stage further and ask the questions -- what does it mean to say, as the Book of Genesis insists, that you and I are made in the image of, and meant to reflect, this God of the Trinity?

1. For one, God is the Creator and the Human, made in God’s Image, as meant to be creative.

This certainly is part of the theme of the Book of Genesis. It opens with the picture of God brooding over chaotic waters, bringing order out of chaos, saying, “let there be light”, “let there be a firmament”, and so on. But in the midst of the evolving world that God calls forth, there is the human. To him, to her, is given the uniqueness of being able to be addressed by God. To the creature God speaks a word: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion...” (1:28) What the world is to be like is determined in part by our choices as well as by God’s!

In the symbolic parables of Genesis, the human who brought forth on the sixth day and is given authority and vice-regency in the world is bidden to keep a Sabbath on the seventh day, so that life can gain proper perspective and come under the surveillance and command of God. Creativeness or chaos -- the human has the capacity for both, and it will be chaos if we don’t bring our powers into line with the loving will of God.

Canada had the dubious distinction of inventing in Suffield, Alberta, the deadliest known nerve gas. Drop some on a person and he would be dead within 36 seconds. Creativeness or chaos? The scientific bent that allows for a Frederick Banting and Jonas Salk giving the world the blessing of insulin and polio vaccine can also allow for Canada’s white-coated merchants of death with their extremely efficient nerve gas. God is Creator, and the human, made in God’s image, is meant to be creative.

2. God is also Saviour and the Human, made in God’s image, is meant to be redemptive.

This is the vital relevance of Jesus Christ. He defines God as Love, as the Forgiving One. God the Creator is known through Jesus Christ as one who says to sinful children: “I forgive you. Go in peace and sin no more.”

And as humans, made in God’s image, we must see part of our purpose, in the light of the God who is Saviour. Recognizing we have the freedom which allows us to err in ways that pit ourselves against our fellow, our families, we are meant to be the creature who forgives, who turns hatred into love.

We are to be “little Christs”. This is true, most certainly, in the sense commanded by Christ himself: “Love one another as I have loved you.” And he loved us redemptively, forgivingly, meeting hatred with love, violence with kindness.

The human, made in the image of God the Saviour, is called into a forgiving, redemptive life.

3. This finally: God is the Holy Spirit who calls us into Christian Community and the Human, made in the image of God, is meant to live and work in the community.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, said: “All who are led by the spirit of god are children of god.”

(8:4) People find themselves drawn together and bound together because they have been claimed by the same God. They belong to each other because they belong forever to God. Said the writer of first John: “If anyone says, ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he is a liar...He who loves God should love his brother also”. (1 John 4:20) The Spirit of God creates community; the human, made in that image, is to live in community.

The human, made in God's image, has that task: to break down the boundaries of Indian reservations, to tear down and burn up the refugee camps of the world, to rip down the walls of apartheid and racism. God the Spirit, calling us into community, gives us the task of living and working in and creating a community of love and service.

In traditional language: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit." "And God said: 'Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness'".