

CARING COMMUNITY

Scripture Readings: Genesis 1:1-24a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Texts: Psalm 8:3-6; Matthew 28: 20

Trinity Sunday is the one Sunday of the church year where we focus on a doctrine of the church that is inferred from Scriptures rather than overtly found there. The doctrine itself was not even named until the end of the second century and Christians have been arguing about it ever since. The Nicene Creed which we recite on Communion Sundays came out of a need to better understand the Trinity in the 4th century. Emperor Constantine basically threatened the bishops gathered at Nicaea that he would let them starve until they came up with an agreement about the Trinity. The first great rift in the Christian church in the 11th century came over a dispute about the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and to the Son. Even now theologians wrestle with the concept with some suggesting that it is an outdated idea, and others suggesting that three persons are too few.

For our sisters and brothers in the other Abrahamic faiths, Christianity is suspect. Judaism and Islam are strict monotheisms and they view the Trinity as smacking of polytheism. Trying to explain the Trinity is a struggle; no metaphor works quite right and most explanations are too simple or way too complex. So we are reduced to mentioning the Trinity in creeds or songs, or using it to trip up young candidates for the ministry when they are examined before the presbytery—my favorite: How would explain the Trinity during the children’s sermon?

So no matter how well educated you are or how much you’ve read on the Trinity, we have to finally concede that the Trinity is a mystery; that is, not a puzzle to be solved but something about God that the human mind cannot fully grasp—and that is what I have to preach about.

I can say this: for me, the power of the idea of Trinity is to think of the very being of God as community. Within God’s self, God is the essence of a gentle, loving community where the various aspects of God’s self are in perfect relationship with one another in respect, honor, and love. The community is not competitive but exists by being collaborative.

God invites the creation, us, to participate in this gentle, loving community. The wonder of this invitation is heard in the words of Psalm 8. The psalmist is in awe that

the being who created this world regards us with such care. The psalmist also exclaims that the delight of the whole creation is given over to our care.

Psalm 8 is the companion reading for the other Hebrew Bible reading for today: the first creation story in Genesis. The most direct connection between these two readings is in God's creation of human beings and the task God assigns us. The sticky word in both passages is in the word 'dominion.' The English translation of the Hebrew word is pretty straight forward; there really is no other English word that fits the Hebrew as well.

In my experience, some people have found the word 'dominion' troubling because it seems so close to domination. Even the definition of dominion can point in that direction: supreme authority: sovereign. In other words, in the first creation story and in the Psalm God has assigned us as kings and queens of the creation—maybe the movie, *Titanic*, is not so far off after all.

The trouble, of course, is how we think of kings and queens—especially in the U.S. where we successfully revolted against a king. We probably think of these kinds of rulers in this way: accumulating vast wealth, wearing crowns, having people bow down to them, and having the fate of all in the dominion's realm under their heels. In the 6th or 5th centuries BCE, some of these aspects might have been practiced by kings and queens but such rulers would not have been regarded as good kings and queens.

For the writers of the Hebrew Bible, kings and queens were anointed as the sons and daughters of God and they were expected to rule as God would rule. This type of rule meant that the ruler was the representative of the whole realm, hence the royal 'we.' The ruler, then, was expected to be the caretaker of the realm even caring for the poorest and most vulnerable. In the Hebrew Bible, we find example after example of God's deep concern for the most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, and the alien in the land. The ruler not only takes care of the citizens of the state, the ruler is also expected to protect the citizens from external threats. The health of realm is reflected in the care exercised by the ruler.

This definition of the ruler who rules like God means that s/her does not exploit or abuse the realm and its citizens, nor is the ruler to think s/he is entitled to use the resources of the realm for him/herself. Rather the ruler sustainably uses the resources of the realm so that the generations who follow may also use them.

God's call to us to exercise dominion in the creations means that we share God's love and care for the creation; we have been called, as Dorothee Soelle describes it, into partnership with God—that is, part of the community that is God. As co-creators with God, we are to keep the creation 'good' as God declared it. Keeping the creation

‘good’ means that we are in community not only with God but also with the creation itself—not just other human beings but also the creatures and environment in which we all live.

So, how are we doing with this particular call?

Well, as we know, in the Hebrew Scriptures, we hear all the stories where we, humans, fall short of good caretaking. It is not just the environment where we fail, we don’t even always do a good job of taking care of one another. Even when God issues a set of operating instructions, we insist on retranslating them or interpreting them in such a way that only some of us benefit. We forget that we are part of a much larger community, and that we can barely exercise sovereignty over our own lives.

God calls prophets to remind us that to be in community with God means that you have to be community with one another, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. When we ignored prophets, God finally entered into creation to show us how to be in community with one another. God in Jesus demonstrated gentle, loving community that was collaborative rather than competitive, where we respect and honor one another.

Even when we resisted this demonstration of gentle, loving community by responding with violence, God didn’t let death get in the way. God showed us that life is more than death, love is more than hate and division. When this lesson was completed, Jesus left us with the Spirit so that we can be reminded again and again that community with love, honor, and respect is the community within God’s very self.

When we accept this community, we are called once again to show dominion by going into the whole creation and doing as Jesus commissioned in the gospel of Matthew: to baptize and to teach all to obey everything that I have commanded you. Jesus’ command was pretty simple: Love God with all your being and love one another as you love yourselves—that is, join the community of God’s very self which, in turn, brings you into community with what God loves, the creation itself.

If we do that then you don’t have to get Trinity because you’ll be doing it.

©2017 Kevin B. Buchanan