

Genesis 1:1-2:4a  
Psalm 8  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13  
Matthew 28:16-20

Trinity Sunday A  
St Paul's Port Townsend  
June 19, 2011

I've heard it said that Trinity Sunday is the quintessential thorn in the side for most preachers, the day the Rector leaves the preaching to the Deacon, the Associate or the retired clergy. Very clever, that Elizabeth - she didn't just leave the preaching to others, she left all together!

Kidding aside, Trinity Sunday asks a lot of us as preachers and as hearers... not just because the Trinity is deeply mysterious and irresolvable, but because it is the one Sunday in the liturgical year when we're truly encouraged to consider church doctrine. I'm not sure how that sits with you, but the notion of preaching doctrine doesn't hold much interest for me. I think that's because the doctrine of the trinity – that God is what tradition has called Father, Son and Spirit, that they are of the same substance, that they are three persons and at the same time one God – all that doctrine doesn't seem to have much to do with our lives. But what does have to do with our lives is the reality that God is profoundly relational. That our Trinitarian God doesn't simply exist in community, but that **God's very nature is community**. God is not some other-worldly mastermind, sitting on a throne passing judgment or granting mercy at whim. God is not a distant, solitary supreme being. Rather, God is communion. The one God is three persons who constantly pour themselves out for one another in such deep love that they are actually comingled. They are one. The Creator pours out, creating all things, begetting the Son, who pours himself out for us and for the Father in order to redeem all, and the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the one given by the Christ, poured of the heart of God, is poured into us so that we too might pour ourselves out for God and know ourselves to be a part of this communion which is God. It is enough to say that God is communion, and made in God's image, we are communion too. The Trinity is not something we need strive to understand – we cannot understand it. This is God we're talking about, and God is always a mystery. To attempt to go too far in explaining it away would do just that – explain away the mystery and so explain away God. Instead we can recognize that we have been invited into the mystery, into the Trinity, into the communal life of God. Because we are created in God's image, we are constantly being called into communion, to become receptive vessels of God's boundless and self-effusive love, and to pour ourselves out for the love of God and the life of the world. Understanding ourselves as participants in the life of God is to understand ourselves as channels of God's love, people in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and through whom Christ is made visible in the world. Do we understand what all that means all the time? No. Do we understand ourselves in this way all the time? We don't. But we are in good company... the disciples who spent three very important years of their lives in Jesus' presence didn't understand everything all the time either. In fact, there was some major denial and some serious doubt.

**When they saw him**, Matthew tells us, **they worshipped him; but some doubted.**

But some doubted.

That's the bit that gets my attention. That in the community of Jesus' disciples, everybody worshipped, but even as they worshipped, some doubted. I am profoundly comforted by those three little words in this passage – by the reality that even the ones who had been with Jesus, seen him cast out demons, heal the sick, proclaim good news to the poor, the ones who had lived through his entire earthly ministry, his death and his resurrection – even they doubted.

The way Matthew tells this story, the disciples left the scene when Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem and aren't heard from again until this moment. Matthew doesn't tell of seeing Jesus after he was raised, doesn't give us a description of what he looked like or tell us he was mistaken for a gardener. We hear of no roadside encounter on the road to Emmaus, no breakfast on the beach, no walking through closed doors offering "Peace be with you." In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is arrested and the disciples disappear, only to return for these last moments of Jesus' life. And when they met him at the mountain, they worshipped him. Even the ones who doubted.

Do you have places of doubt in your faith life? Do you remember times or situations when you weren't sure about God? My mother died while I was in seminary, and even in that profoundly faith-filled environment, I found myself praying to God... this whole resurrection bit, this better be true – this is my mother we're talking about. I've come to understand that time-of-doubt as a time of profound faithfulness for me – a time when God's promises perhaps mattered more to me than they had ever mattered before. I desperately wanted God's promises to be true, and while certainty was out of the question, my faith was what held me in relationship with my mother and with God.

I am mindful of how often we encounter doubt in the gospels. I am mindful of how often we encounter doubt in our own lives. And God is so generous, so insistent on remaining in relationship that time and again the doubters *through their doubting* come ever more deeply into relationship with God. Scripture's intentional inclusion of doubters tells us that the point isn't perfect faith, the point is staying in relationship. When we doubt, we are engaging and wrestling and wondering - with our faith, with our lives, with our God. Doubt need not trouble us – there is plenteous room for doubt within faith... it's certainty that ought to make us a little nervous.

When Jesus gave that Great Commission, sending the disciples out to baptize the nations, the doubters were commissioned right along with everyone else. Jesus wasn't commissioning certain and perfect believers then, nor is he commissioning certain and perfect believers now... he's commissioning us... the ones who sometimes doubt. We who don't always get it, we who doubt, ***we are the ones*** charged to spread the good news to all the nations. Just as ***In the beginning*** the creator God spoke ***everything – sun, moon and stars, earth wind and water and every living thing***<sup>1</sup> into being and so into relationship, here ***at the very end of Jesus' life*** he does the same – he tells the disciples that life in God belongs everywhere and to everyone, that in God all people are in communion – all are one. If one rejoices, we all rejoice. If one is hungry, we all are hungry. If one is lonely, we are all lonely. If one suffers, we all suffer. "*Whatever you do to the least of these*" Jesus said, "*you do to me.*"<sup>2</sup> That's what it means to be the many members of one body that Paul talked about in that letter to the Corinthians. It's what it

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<sup>1</sup> Enriching Our Worship, Eucharistic Prayer 2

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:40

means to be a part of the communion that is the three persons of the one God. It's why Jesus sent the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – we all belong in this communion of love. This is the grace of God, that we all dwell in the Creator God who is source of all. In the Redeemer God who turns everything to love. In the Sanctifying God who dwells in us, sustaining us and making us holy. The God who has called us to in to the new life of love is the same God who sends us out to call others into new life in God. To pour ourselves out for the sake of love is to finally know ourselves beloved of God – the living God who is continually creating, sustaining and sanctifying our lives... not in spite of our doubts or our inability to get it right. But simply because God loves us. Because love is who God is and there is simply nothing else God could do.

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