

Trinity Sunday  
May 30, 2021  
Isaiah 6:1-8  
Psalm 29  
Romans 8:12-17  
JOHN 3:1-17

## “DANCING” WITH THE HOLY TRINITY

Trinity Sunday is the day every year when we focus on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: God in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Seminary professors of theology can give long, deep and intricate lectures on the doctrine of the Trinity. I know. I’ve sat through some. Rest assured, I’m not going to do that to you.

I believe the doctrine of the Trinity is both very profound and very simple — and very, very pertinent to us, especially at this moment in history. To believe that we worship one God in three Persons is to state that ***God cannot be God without relationships***. Even before the Creation, God had *relationships* within God’s self. And it is in the nature of God to create and then invite others into *holy, life-affirming, life-transforming relationships with God — and with each other*.

In perhaps the most famous verse in the New Testament, Jesus says in today’s Gospel, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

And we don’t have to wait for heaven in order to receive stirrings of eternal life within ourselves and within our communities — the first stirrings of eternal life can and sometimes do begin *now*. I will tell a couple of stories today about some such stirrings within some people and the church communities whose lives they touched. More stories next week.

God invites people into *relationships* with God just as God invited Isaiah, as described in today’s Old Testament reading. Isaiah was moved to awe, wonder and a deep sense of unworthiness which brought forth absolution for him from God and stirred Isaiah to say, “Here am I, send me.” *We can each and all say that today* within our existing contexts. As can many people, including some who secular people might consider “unlikely prospects.”

As we experience our vocations grow, especially in the wake of reaffirming our Baptismal vows and Covenant on Pentecost last Sunday, we join together in saying or singing the “Holy, Holy Holy,” the “Sanctus,” which Isaiah heard the *angels* sing. Our holy *relationships* stretch far beyond this world.

And, moved by the Holy Spirit, we can use the word in prayer to God which Jesus used and which St. Paul quotes in today’s Epistle “when we pray ‘Abba, Father.’” “Abba” is the word Jesus used in his native Aramaic language to pray to God the Father, and it means “Father” not in some stern, remote Victorian sense, but in an intimate way, more like “Daddy.” As if each of us were a four year old child longing to sit in the lap of strong and loving “Our Abba, who are in heaven.”

Well, we’ve all had days like that, haven’t we? Especially in the last 15 months. Anybody here especially *cherish* any good *relationships* which have helped to sustain us in these oh so challenging times? Yeah, me too.

Thank God, God has been and always will be in each and all of our individual “bubbles.” We never have to be six feet away from God — nor can we be. As one of our fellow parishioners told another fellow parishioner, “God is closer than my own breath.”

And while we have to say “goodbye” to some relationships, or “goodbye until we meet again,” God is the one being to whom we *never have* to say goodbye.

But, we might need a new or additional vision of God to realize how *dynamic* this relationship with God can be for us and for others. Some of us may have grown up with a picture in our heads of God as an old white man with a beard sitting on a throne, sort of like a celestial Lincoln Memorial.

When God told Moses at the burning bush God’s own personal Name, the Divine Name translates to, “I am who I am,” or “I will be who I will be.” Sounds pretty *dynamic* to me. And marble statues don’t get born in a stable, work as a carpenter, call disciples, teach, touch, heal, suffer, die and rise again opening the door to eternal life.

Marble statues don’t light up the disciples on Pentecost — or on any day — and exponentially increase their numbers. Marble statues don’t empower and direct disciples like them or like us to share the Good News of God as it had never been shared before.

So, when we think of the Holy Trinity, I’d like you to imagine the three Persons of the Trinity *dancing*. Maybe a waltz, maybe hip hop. Classical ballet, or salsa. Maybe the dance in the finale of the movie “Zorba the Greek,” maybe square dancing.

And the Holy Trinity invites *us* to join in God's creative, holy, life-affirming, life-transforming *dance*. Maybe we can envision a tender Father/daughter wedding reception dance with a strong, gentle God the Father while the d.j. plays [I sing] "You are the wind beneath my wings." Or maybe we can join Jesus at the wedding reception in Cana of Galilee. Hava Nagila, anyone? (If you want to see people really *dance* with joy, go to an Orthodox Jewish wedding reception.)

The possibilities for dancing with the Holy Spirit are literally limitless, though I suspect one item on the sound track would be [I sing] "We are family." More about *that* next week.

Each of us and all of us can "dance with God" spiritually; you don't need to be physically gifted for dancing or young and spry (Elda will tell you that I am neither) for *spiritual dancing*.

God knows all the moves and all the choreography that ever was, is or will be. And God invites everyone to dance with the *real* stars, the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, even and especially those who people might not have thought could dance with God in such life-affirming, life-transforming and wonderfully *contagious* ways — like the people I will conclude by telling you about.

My first story goes back 50 years. In the early '70s, the Episcopal Church went through something called "liturgical renewal" which led to our current Prayer Book. Some of you also recall those times. Part of liturgical renewal invited Episcopalians to "dance with God" in ways that were not as intellectual or individualistic or as *stiff* as some of us — like me and my WASP "homies" in New England — were used to.

"Passing the Peace" in the Eucharist is an ancient custom of the Christian Church which had fallen out of use for centuries and was being revived in the early '70s. Some of us "didn't get it." Nor did I, until I and the parish I belonged to had some unexpected "professors of practical liturgy."

The people who taught the highly educated, very WASPy other members of Christ Episcopal Church, Oberlin, Ohio (my college church) were eight women who lived in a group home for developmentally disabled adults who, with their "People in Charge" of the home (the term chosen by the residents), worshipped as part of Christ Church *every week*.

At church the ladies heard that God loves everyone (today's Gospel, right?), that we are encouraged to *share* God's love, *and* we could all share God's love with each other in the middle of the worship service when we passed "the Peace of the Lord" ! These ladies became "early adopters." Every change needs some who are early adopters.

They enthusiastically passed the peace with *everyone, each of the eight of them, with all* 100-150 of us at the later service. The Rector saw what was happening and let it ride.

Those ladies thawed out “God’s frozen chosen.” They transformed worship. Emotion, community and *relationships* thrived while nobody had to leave their intellects or individuality behind. I personally began to focus not so much on their *disabilities* as on their God-given *abilities*. A good thing. Thank you, ladies.

Fast-forward 20 years to the early 1990’s. I was Rector of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Monmouth Junction, New Jersey and the father of a six year-old boy. Another six year-old boy started coming to worship who had a very different life story. He and his mother were invited to come to church by a friend who was a parishioner after the mother and son had survived domestic violence.

The boy was a “Special Needs” child with weak social skills who did not make eye contact and was non-verbal. Could *he* “dance with God?”

He was understandably scared. This to him big, new place, all these people he didn’t know, all the noise and commotion, and this tall white guy with the long robe who seemed to be in the middle of whatever it was that was going on.

*Could he feel safe here?* He hadn’t even been safe at home.

And he had another challenge, which I understand a little more about now than I did then. This understandably scared little boy was a scared little *Black* boy who was already near or at the age when Black boys in America are given “The Talk” by a parent or parents: how to try and stay safe when stopped by a police officer for no particular reason.

How does an-already traumatized child with limited social skills who doesn’t make eye contact and is non-verbal learn to handle such an encounter?

He doesn’t. He can’t. I can imagine all kinds of ways such an encounter could end badly. It’s hard enough for people without any of those disabilities. This boy would need a bodyguard all his life, for this situation and all situations.

In that moment when he and his mother came to church, however, the question was: could he somehow come to feel safe and calm in and as a part of the church, instead of his head anxiously darting around all the time as he was overwhelmed by the stimuli? And if he, a non-verbal person, could come to feel safe, *how would I know?*

*Like I said, God is really, really good at relationships. And choreography.*

I look very big in my robes to young children, so when I'm giving communion to them, or blessing those who are not yet receiving communion, I get down in a crouch like a baseball catcher to get close to their eye level when they're kneeling at the altar. For blessings, I usually put my hand gently on the kid's head and, if possible, bless him or her by name.

I had then not yet gone through the 40 hours of training required for volunteers at shelters for survivors domestic violence as I now have, but I knew enough even then to know I shouldn't touch the boy *until he gave me his permission*. So I crouched and held my hand about six inches over his head while I blessed him in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. His head would dart around as I did this as he looked anxiously all over the sanctuary.

Until one Sunday. One Sunday, I crouched in front of him as usual — and his big eyes looked straight into mine. *For the first time*. His eyes looked deep and long into mine, and slowly a *smile* spread through his face which lit up the whole sanctuary. And, his eyes still locked on mine, he slowly nodded his head. I reached lower with my hand, and gently touched his head while blessing him in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, while his eyes, his smile and his nodding head reached deep into my soul. I carry that picture in my mind's eye to this day.

He taught the parish that it could incorporate people into the *community and its relationships* who were going through some really big challenges. The parish grew in every sense. St. Barnabas, like Christ Church, Oberlin, learned to “dance with God” in new ways from some great teachers.

Our final hymn today will be “This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine.” Their lights still shine, as do *ours* at St. Francis, as we grow in relationship with God and with each other and with the world which needs God and needs us so much. Thank you, God, for inviting us to “dance” with you, with each other and with the world in holy, life-affirming, life-transforming ways.

And when we come to that hymn, whether you're here in the sanctuary or at home, if you feel like clapping to the music — or even *dancing* — please go right ahead.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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