

Trinity and Racism

[Genesis 1:1-2:4a](#)

Today is Trinity Sunday when we focus on the idea of God as three persons in total unity.

It doesn't make a lot of sense to us because we have no way of conceiving a Being who is more complex than ourselves. And there is no passage in the Bible which lays it out. Jesus talked a lot, at least in John's gospel which we have been reading recently, about his oneness with the Father who we equate with the Creator. And then he said that the Holy Spirit would come in his place to live alongside us.

Our understanding of the Triune God comes not from Jesus' words, but from the lived experience of the early Christians as they tried to make sense of the encounters they were having with God who was in and among them, and was Jesus but was not Jesus.

The way we image God in our hearts and minds affects everything. If we imagine God to be angry and vengeful then we will be going around trying not to step outside the bounds he has set, lest we be punished. And what's more, we will see no reason not to be angry and vengeful towards those who step outside the bounds we have set. On the other hand, if God is unconditionally loving, then not only do we get to love ourselves – because who would say we know better than God – but we get to love other people and creatures as well.

We can think of the Trinity not as something static like a triangle but as something more like a sphere constantly in motion, constantly relating, constantly creating, constantly loving and singing with joy and praise.

Every year, starting in mid-August, we get flocks of sandpipers visiting the bay. I'm sure you've seen them. Those little birds that feed along the shoreline and then suddenly fly up, and swoop and soar, all in a flock together, almost as though someone threw a handful of living confetti in the air. It's amazing to me that they never fly into one another even though they are constantly changing places in the air. Tens or even hundreds of sandpipers move as one bird.

I think the Trinity may be a little like that. Completely aligned, completely relational; moving as one but actually three.

In the reading this morning from the first Creation story, we heard that God made humans in God's own image. Later Christian teaching tells us that as a result of sin that image became tarnished and it is only through the grace of God in Jesus that we may be restored into the full image of God. That is what Christian formation is about – helping us to grow into the full image of God so that we may be the Christ-like beings we were created to be.

Yet even though the image is tarnished, there are many ways in which humans still reflect the likeness of God. And one of these is that we are relational. We are flock birds. Relationality is

part of our basic nature, just as it is part of the basic nature of the Trinity. Humans are made to live in creative relationship with one another, not walking in lockstep but swooping and soaring together, then individually walking separately but staying close together, like the sandpipers.

And even as we shelter at home, we continue to belong to groups. We belong to our families, we belong to communities of ideas, we continue to be one Body of Christ.

Groups and communities are formed not so much by where we put our bodies but by the concepts of our minds – by the values that inspire us, the narratives that grip our attention, the boundaries that we create which define who is in and who is not in the group. That is natural. In a world of seven and a half billion people we cannot know everyone even slightly. Even in this town of just 14,000 people, we will never have a personal relationship with everyone.

Yet, as we have seen graphically in these last weeks, the boundaries we create in our minds can have a direct effect on our behavior. Derek Chauvin could never have knelt on George Floyd's neck for over 8 minutes if he had seen him as like him, a member of the same group. No, Chauvin saw him as lesser. He saw Floyd as somehow not made in the image of God. Pastor David J. Lose wrote, "Racism, at its heart, makes someone who should be intimately recognizable to us – one also created in the image of God and so a fellow child of God – into someone or, really, something other than us, someone/thing we need not recognize as bearing the same dignity and rights that we take for granted."

Racism, just like classism and sexism and homophobia, is a matter of the mind and heart. Whenever we make someone lesser in our minds we are joining in that same sin. And it is necessary and important that we as the people of an infinitely loving, totally relational, Triune God, take the responsibility to examine our thoughts and to repent whenever we find that we have made someone lesser in our minds. This is seriously challenging and this is serious spiritual work.

There are many ways we make people lesser. Here are a few of mine: I look at what the person in front of me in the checker line is buying and wonder how they could eat such bad food, of course I never would; I watch men playing with motorized toy cars or drones and wonder when they will grow up; I listen to political pundits with whom I disagree and wonder whether they have any brains at all; I think about fundamental Christians and pity their limited world view... yes I could go on. There are many prejudices in my mind. There are many people whom I condemn as somehow other, and so less important than me.

This kind of judgmentalism at its heart is just like racism which, "makes someone who should be intimately recognizable to us – one also created in the image of God and so a fellow child of God – into someone...we need not recognize as bearing the same dignity and rights that we take for granted."

My friends, the agony of the racism which is endemic in our society starts in our minds, and from there it moves outward into our behavior. From our minds it moves into the way we live and the attitudes we have which allow us to continue to treat people of color and others who are different from us as if they are not also beloved children of God.

Yet we worship and serve a God who loves difference, who loves diversity. Just take a moment at the back bay in the fall and you will see a lot of different little brown shorebirds. Sandpipers would do. But God gives us curlews and whimbrels and godwits, and sanderlings. Why? because God who is infinitely creative, loves diversity. God loves each and every little thing and every massive thing too. God even loves black holes and supernovas and other things I know absolutely nothing about.

That is the God that we love and serve. The one who is still creating the universe and every day sees that it is good. And the God who calls us to join in that act of creation. We got confused and thought it was domination that God meant but domination is not a characteristic of the triune God who is always relating in love and appreciation, laughing with joy at the antics of the creatures of the world – at the play of young ground squirrels and the skill of the heron or the stealthiness of the black snake – at the beauty of human love and faithfulness – at the explosion of a supernova or the wheeling of a flock of sandpipers.

That is the God whom we worship today – the God who is here with us, who has been here since the beginning of time and will still be with us when we die and beyond – the God who calls us to love more than we can imagine loving – the God who calls us to explore new ways of relating, new ways of thinking, new ways of transforming society, new ways of becoming like Jesus.

Let me finish by quoting a verse from Romans 12:

I appeal to you therefore, sisters and brothers, by the mercies of God.. do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that ... you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.