

SERMON- Trinity Sunday (A)

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Good Shepherd (Virtual)

June 7, 2020

Genesis 1:1-2:4a ~~2-Corinthians 13:11-13~~ Matthew 28:16-20 ~~Psalm 8 or Canticle 13 (or Canticle 2)~~

I speak to you in the name of the One, Holy, and Undivided Trinity. Amen.

OPENING:

The running joke for the last 2 years has been that Trinity Sunday—the Sunday where the Rector usually farms out the sermon to the low person on the preaching totem pole—for some reason, Christine always found herself as the preacher for that day.

But here we are on Trinity Sunday 2020, and I have finally drawn the short straw. ZOOM seems to be operational; I was not able to schedule my vacation for this weekend.

Instead, the impossible task of explaining this 2000-year-old concept, this hallmark of our faith—that we believe in one God, three persons in one, coeternal/consubstantial: Father, Son and Holy Spirit—falls to me.

My saving grace... maybe... is that today is also Youth Sunday, so I am going to preach not only on the mystery of the Trinity, but also on that other great mystery, that of the youth in our Parish.

YOUTH

You have seen, and will see, during this service, the contributions of our young people participating in our liturgy.

It's been a gift and a blessing, during this difficult week, to see those videos, to behold the faces of these important members of our parish family.

It has also reminded me of how much our graduates have been missing out on because of the Coronavirus.

I grieve with them that they are missing so many of the important milestones associated with their senior year: the Spring season of sports, prom, graduation parties, graduation itself, and on and on and on...

GRADUATION/ COMMISSIONING:

Now, one thing that they are missing that they should be *thankful* for missing out on is the Graduation Commencement speech.

I have been to a lot of graduations, and rarely have heard a great graduation speaker.

Instead you usually get kind of bland/vanilla clichés, like:

“You have a lot to live for.

The world is waiting for you to change it.

You can do whatever you put your mind too.”

Pause for a second and think.....

Can you imagine how flat that type of speech would be this year, how difficult it would be to give any sort of graduation speech in 2020?

It would be nearly impossible to sum up the grief, happiness, anxiety, hope, relief that have been the last few months.

You would be almost better off being asked to explain or preach on the Trinity!

What our youth, and what all of us, have lived through over the past few months, you would dare not sugar-coat, you would dare not try to dumb it down.

Instead, you would have to name the reality that life can be... so difficult and so hard. That some things you don't get back. That generations and generations of sin can broil up and manifest themselves all the sudden.

In times such as these, one would be compelled to try to admit that life's mysteries can be so cruel and beautiful and joyous and unforgiving.

Again, you would almost be better off trying to explain or preach the Trinity!

GOSPEL

Today, however, we actually do have an example of a good graduation speech, right there in front of us. Jesus gives us a type of one in our Gospel, the so-called Great Commission at the very end of Matthew's Gospel. It's short and sweet and to the point: three Sentences, including the Trinitarian formula, and the disciples get to throw their caps up in the air.

It's short on answers though, it does not explain the mysteries.

There is not a "How-To" description on the Trinity, or how to stay out of trouble with the Roman Empire, on why "bad things happen to good people"

The cynic among us might complain then: "Why not? Why didn't Jesus give the disciples more precise marching orders?"

Why these breadcrumbs? Why plant the seeds related to the Trinity, why not just spell it out?

It reminds me of Harry Potter's complaint throughout the *Harry Potter* series: "Why didn't Professor Dumbledore just tell me what I needed to do?"¹

MYSTERY

Jesus ends his speech by simply saying:

"I am with you always, to the end of the age."²

And Matthew does not resolve it for us.

One author writes that's because it seems "there was a mystery about Jesus which even his best friends could not penetrate."³

That word "mystery" keeps popping up, that word that you are not supposed to fall back upon (at least too many times) in a Trinity Sunday sermon.

The word though might just suggest that today, on Youth Sunday, on Trinity Sunday, we can be honest with our Youth, that life is hard, that it does not always make sense, and that's one of God's mysteries. And clearly adults don't have it figured out.

My sense is that, after these last few months they already know this, that they know that life cannot be explained in broad brushstrokes. Instead we are left with the mystery of God's grace and joy peeking through and promise from Jesus that he will be with us, to the end of the age.

¹ <https://www.tor.com/2017/08/07/5-things-albus-dumbledore-should-have-told-harry-potter-for-the-sake-of-basic-human-decency/>

² Matthew 28.20

³ Wright, N. T. 2003. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 644. (Emphasis added)

CONCLUSION

I read somewhere that the goal of a Trinity Sunday sermon should be to leave people with an expanded view of God, still marveling and questioning the nature of the Trinity, gasping at the mystery.

Fred Craddock said it this way: "...too many sermons give the distinct impression that the preacher had walked all the way around God and had taken pictures. Too many sermons are neatly folded, all the ends tucked in, **no mystery, no grandeur**... such sermons leave no one scratching their head or with mouth agape over the awesome nature of God's glory."⁴

Living in complex and mysterious times, this is Good News: "When we look at God we should not expect anything less complex than we find in ourselves." We make attempts with words like *personae* and *hypostasis* and *homousian* and all sorts of Greek terms to explain the Trinity or make sense of God, but we fall short.⁵

We live in complex and mysterious times.

But I take comfort in the presence and witness of our youth, especially over these last few months:

I take comfort in their faithfulness in maintaining community with one another,

I take comfort in their eagerness to participate in this service and this strange new life of the Parish,

and I take comfort in their ability to laugh and cry and wonder through all the mysteries that God has to offer.

They remind me of Jesus' final words that, regardless what comes next, 'he is with us always, to the end of the age.'

AMEN

⁴ Quoted in Fred Craddock, *As One with Authority*, from https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-15b/?type=the_lectionary_gospel (Emphasis Added)

⁵ These lines are taken from a sermon of my grandfather, the Reverend Charles R. Allen, gave on Trinity Sunday, 1961.