

When the Pieces Fit

Psalm 8
Romans 8:12-17

May 27, 2018
Trinity Sunday

“Before the beginning of time, the Father, Son, and Spirit counseled together and decided to expand the fellowship they had with one another. And so were created the heavens and the earth. God wanted to enlarge the love relationship between the Father and the Son through the Spirit. In the words of C. S. Lewis, ‘The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us.’”¹

You could spend a lifetime and not get through the depth and meaning of that paragraph. Actually, scientists, theologians, and wise men and women throughout history come to a point in their thinking when all they can do is echo the words of the psalmist who said,

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honor. (Psalm 8:3-5, TNIV)

Yes! Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been captured or captivated by a sense of wonder that penetratingly profound? All achievement, all knowledge rigorously learned and rightly lived points us Godward.

This is Trinity Sunday. It kicks off the unfortunately named period in the church year called ‘Ordinary Time,’ which ends on ‘Christ the King’ Sunday, November 25 of this year.

There’s one word I want you to keep in mind when you think of Trinity.

Relationship

Brian McLaren says,

“The ultimate reality is communication between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They exist in eternal connection,

¹ Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, Jesus: A Theography (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2012) p. 8.

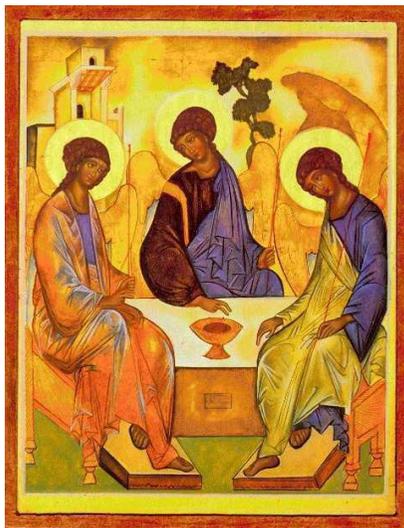
eternal community,"² each one pouring itself into the other. That's the model for you and me, and for creation itself.

The waste product of plant life, oxygen, is the life of breathing things, and the waste product of breathing things, carbon dioxide, is the life of trees and other forms of plant life. We have the life cycle of seeds planted, fullness, and harvest, life, death and resurrection all around us,³ a constant cycle, refreshing, nourishing, giving, receiving, that's what theologians call the Kingdom of God, and we who live it out day to day make up the church, the Body of Christ.

Relationship

This came to me in a visual way not long ago when I came across a piece of art created by a 14th century Russian painter named Andrei Rublev entitled, simply enough, 'The Trinity.' Some time ago the Russian Orthodox Church chose it as the model for understanding the Trinity. It's on the back of your bulletin this morning. Find that, please.

This should look familiar to many of you, since we looked at this a year ago.



The more immediate context was the visit of the three angels to Abraham in the Old Testament. As the conversation progresses he seems to be talking with God. Now, keep your eyes on the painting.

² Brian McLaren, as cited in Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling, Connecting Like Jesus: Practices for Healing, Teaching and Preaching (San Francisco, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010) p. 7.

³ Sweet, et. al., pp. 44, 22

The three are shown in equal dignity and in the order in which they're confessed in the Creed: God the Father on the left, God the Son in the center, and God the Holy Spirit on the right. Each person holds a staff, which is so long that it cuts the picture into sections. The staff is for a journey, our journey, one that we do not make alone. The traveler God sits at our ordinary table and spreads it with a hint of heaven.

The Father is wearing a blue undergarment that seems to morph into a light purple on the outside. It's hard to describe, and that's how it should be, since no one has seen the Father. There's a house above him that speaks of his master plan for creation. He's in front of the house since he's the head of creation. There are many rooms in the Father's house, as we learn in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, and the Son prepares a place for us.

The Father's head is not bowed, and he's looking at the other two. The other two have their heads slightly bowed, and their eyes are turned toward the Father.

The Son is in the center. Above him are the branches of an oak tree, a reminder of the tree in the Garden of Eden and of the cross. His clothing is a dark reddish brown, symbolic of his incarnation, and his blue robe shows his divinity.

On the right is the Spirit. His blue undergarment and smoky-green outer garment represent heaven and earth, and signify the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Above him is the mountain of prayer. It can be steep and rocky, but the journeying God goes before us.

With all these distinctive features, the three faces are identical. How might this help you understand the nature of the Trinity?

They all wear a blue garment, the color of the sky, but each wears something that speaks of his own identity. How might this help you understand the nature of the Trinity?

Both of the Father's hands are holding his staff since he's the Creator.

The Son's clothing speaks of the earth, of his humanity. The gold stripe speaks of his kingship. He has two fingers on the table, corresponding to his divine and human natures. He points to a cup at the center of the table.

The tree behind him is the tree of death, which becomes the tree of eternal life, lost to humankind in the Garden of Genesis, restored by the obedience of Christ. It could also be the tree of life in the book of Revelation that bears 12 kinds of fruit, one for each month of the year, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.

The Spirit touches the table as well, with a mountain at his back, serving as a link between the heavens and the earth.

Moses encountered God on a mountain. Elijah did as well, in a wonderfully mysterious way. Jesus was transfigured there. Think of your own mountaintop experiences.

And so, we're back to relationships.

Look at the symmetry, the relationships that form a circle. At the center is a table, God's place of hospitality for us, with a full cup in the center. Notice there's an open space at the table. You're invited to join the group, to complete the circle, to join the dance, if you will.

Come, follow the Spirit up the mountain where you can meet God. Live in the shadow of the Son, resting beneath his tree of life. Come and journey to the home, waiting for you in your Father's house.⁴

Relationship

This side of eternity, the church, the Body of Christ, is how it's to be lived and acted out: a flow, a circle, constant refreshment, nourishment and support. We get to show the world how it's done. How is it going with you?

⁴ Material on the painting is from the following:
<http://www.sacredheartpullman.org/Icon%20explanation.htm>
http://www.holy-transfiguration.org/library_en/lord_trinity_rublev.html
http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/rublevs_icon/trinity.htm