

Holy Trinity A (6/11/17)
 Genesis 1:1-2:4a
 Psalm 8
 2 Corinthians 13:11-13
Matthew 28:16-20

Everything is customizable these days, everything is individualized. But this degree of freedom can be paralyzing. If everything depends upon personal choice, then you are uniquely responsible for shaping your life. Everything is up to you, it seems. But Christian faith – faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is necessarily relational. It’s not about you; it’s about us. The mutuality and love at the heart of the divine life invites us to participate in that mutuality and love, not only with God but also with each other, and with disciples we have yet to meet.

Parsing out the meaning of the Holy Trinity is the theological equivalent of tackling an elusive math problem. Some of us enjoy the challenge, and find satisfaction in striving for better understanding. The rest of us would probably rather do chores. The temptation for preachers on Holy Trinity Sunday is to bombard our listeners with historical formulations or images of the Trinity, betraying our own desire for theological precision. “This is our inclination, our instinct,” writes Karoline Lewis, “to domesticate wonder, to clarify awe, to tame transcendence.”¹ If you’d like to discuss the details of Trinitarian theology, I’m happy to oblige. But, the truth is that **the Holy Trinity is finally a mystery. All our efforts to explain the Trinity, of course, fall short of its fullness, and God remains where God belongs: beyond our human categories.**

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4913>.

Acknowledging the Trinity's transcendence, however, doesn't mean we ought to discard the theology. Trinitarian language is, after all, "our best attempt to say something [about God] instead of nothing."² **We yearn to know the One who shapes and sustains the universe, yet who does not stand above our tiny existence, but enters it to share our vulnerability and show us the way; the same One who draws us together around sacred stories and holy food, strengthening and sending us to be signs of divine love.** This is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Three in One and One in Three; Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; Roots, Trunk, and Branches – the same substance but different entities, intimately connected.³

Anne Lamott makes a distinction between the effort to comprehend the Holy Trinity and the practice of simply cherishing it: "I didn't need to understand the hypostatic unity of the Trinity," she writes, "I just needed to turn my life over to whoever came up with redwood trees."⁴ In other words, **God is beyond our categories, yes, and God is among us. The doctrine of the Trinity is a means of affirming both the transcendence and immanence of God, both God's majesty and God's longing to come alongside us, to bless us.**

² Martin Marty paraphrasing Augustine, in *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers*, 40.

³ See Steven P. Eason paraphrasing Augustine, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 3, 44-46.

⁴ Cited by Lewis.

And, if the doctrine of the Trinity makes a claim about God, it also has something to say about us. There is nothing as important to abundant life as meaningful relationship, yet our culture tends to prioritize independence over social obligation. **According to popular philosophy, each of us is self-made, the captain of our own ship. And, with such autonomy comes a dizzying array of choices. Everything is customizable these days, everything is individualized.**

But this degree of freedom can be paralyzing. If everything depends upon personal choice, then you are uniquely responsible for shaping your life. *Which cell phone plan is right for me? What is my personal sense of style? Who should I follow on Twitter?* These kinds of choices may not seem particularly important, but they fall exclusively to the individual. And in this way, they are akin to more decisive choices: *Which career is right for me? What do I want to experience in my lifetime? Who are my people?*

Graduating seniors, you probably sense the pressure brought on by questions like these. Everything is hanging in the balance as you make critical decisions about your future. Everything is up to you, it seems. But the wisdom of the Holy Trinity is that nothing is only up to you. The image of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit insists that God is eternally relational; God's identity is marked by a "unity of love," to borrow the words of fourth-century bishop Athanasius, "a unity in which the identity of each party is not swallowed up and

annihilated, but established.”⁵ **You, too, are a member of a whole. You are a beloved child of God, invited into the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by those who brought you to the baptismal font. And so, this is where your identity is established, in a communion of saints that spans the centuries and crosses all the boundaries we set. Your individual traits and gifts are not swallowed up in the unity of the body of Christ, but rather affirmed and celebrated, yet employed not only for your own gratification but for the sake of others.**

To put it starkly, *it's not about you*. And, isn't that a relief? **It's not about you; it's about us.** Rachel Held Evans puts it this way:

I'm not exactly sure how all this works, but I think, ultimately, it means I can't be a Christian on my own. Like it or not, following Jesus is a group activity, something we're supposed to do together. We might not always do it within the walls of church or even in an organized religion, but if we are to go about making disciples, confessing our sins, breaking bread, paying attention, and preaching the Word, we're going to need one another.⁶

Dear church, **we're made for each other. Regardless of the different choices we make, regardless of our varying circumstances, God has enfolded us into a unity that reflects God's own image. The mutuality and love at the heart of the divine life invites us to participate in that mutuality and love, not only with God but also with each other, and with disciples we have yet to meet.**

⁵ Cited by Stephen B. Boyd, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 3, 48.

⁶ *Searching for Sunday*, 255.