

Kerry Mansir
Christ Church Gardiner
June 12, 2022
Trinity Sunday

As I have been thinking about preaching this week...Trinity Sunday...the day of the year when we celebrate the mystery of our triune God...I thought about those symbols that we've used in the past to "explain" the Trinity. A triangle with its three sides and angles. Each needed to make the whole, and when those three angles are put together, a shape is formed that is stronger and sturdier than any of the angles alone.

Or there's the shamrock, which legend tells us St. Patrick used that three leafed plant to explain the three-in-one doctrine of the trinity to the pagans of Ireland.

I even discovered a new symbol for the trinity this week as I was driving around town. We bought a hybrid vehicle a few weeks ago. I've become obsessed watching the little screen that shows where the car is getting its power as you drive. I can tell when I am driving more efficiently and getting better gas mileage...which with the price of gas today, is pretty exciting. The visual that the Toyota hybrid uses is a picture of the battery, engine, and the wheels that charge the battery through regenerative braking. They're all in a circle with arrows moving between them showing the transfer of energy. Or something like that...I don't really understand the mechanics or science of the hybrid engine. But this week, watching those arrows light up with energy moving between the three parts that make car run, I couldn't help but think of the trinity and the energy shared between its three parts and how that energy is transferred to us.

I don't expect a hybrid engine to be a symbol of the trinity that works for you, but it did for me. And, I'm certainly not going to write any theological essay on how a hybrid engine is an analogy for how the trinity works. But then, I don't believe that understanding the trinity is really about being able to articulate a theorem or solve an equation.

It's not even really about a set of beliefs that we must agree with like it often seems when we recite the Nicene or Apostle's Creed which attempt to name and describe the three persons of the trinity. As I have said before, I believe that even the creeds are more about the heart than the head. They aren't so much a statement of facts that we make with our heads, but a story that we tell with our hearts. They are "the" story that we give our hearts to. And the trinity is simply the mystery and wonder that is the heart of that story.

God, desiring to be in relationship with us, exists in three ways and comes to us in three ways. As our father and mother. As Jesus, fully human, experiencing all that it means to be human. And as the Spirit, the loving God living in our hearts. That's our Christian story. That each of these is indeed God. And that through the trinity, we come into

relationship with our God who is three-in-one, our creator, our redeemer, and our sustainer.

But we don't stop there. The trinity can help us to see how God wants to be in relationship with us, but it also points to the ways in which we are called to be in relationship with one another.

Because relationship is the heart of who we are as humans. The European Enlightenment may have tried to convince us of "the idea of a person as isolated, inner, individual consciousness, detached from the world." (Will Willimon's Lectionary Sermon Resource, Year A, pg 23) But thanks to the disciplines of sociology, psychology, history and literature, just to name a few, we now know that "personhood can't be divorced from relation."

It's a shame it took us so long to get back to this truth that Paul was already proclaiming in his letter to the Corinthians when he wrote, "You are the body of Christ and parts of each other." (1Cor 12:27). We are part of one another. Relationship is at the core of who we are.

Will Willimon, UMC pastor and one of our country's best preachers, claims that the trinity is complete, mutual, self-giving love and that it is only through the trinity that we can define love...real love, not that shallow sort of thing that is usually more about receiving than giving, that often passes for love in our modern culture.(23)

And real love as understood in the trinity is about relationship...often difficult, trying, nothing easy about it relationship. Willimon goes on to say, that as Christians, we don't have relationships, we are relationship (24). And I love this assertion that he makes about the church.

He says that maybe the most foundational and important thing that the church asks you to do, "is to be a Christian in community with people whom you did not even know before you joined this church and people who, when you get to know them, you [may not] particularly like!" He goes on to say, "We really believe that there is no way for you to grow in Christ when you are alone. You need relationships with other Christians in order to grow in your faith in Christ. Christianity can never be a solo experience because we are Trinitarian." (24)

So if you want to understand the trinity, take a look around you. These people around you, who like you are the body of Christ...and those not sitting here but those you have chosen to be vulnerable with, to be in relationship with.... It is in these connections that you'll glimpse the meaning of the trinity. In the times when those relationships reflect back to you beauty and love. But also in those times when you feel frustration and futility. Staying in relationship even when it's tough...those are probably the times of our greatest growth...and the times when we most learn about the trinity as the mystery and wonder at the heart of what it means for us to call ourselves Christians.