

Today is Trinity Sunday. You can't miss that fact because Walter, our administrator, who does our bulletin, seems to have taken great delight today in finding as many images as he can of the Trinity to enliven our bulletin. It's an unusual festival in the church year. I think it's the only one that doesn't have a story attached to it. So last week was Pentecost, for example, and we were remembering the story of the spirit coming on the disciples in the upper room. The week before that was Ascension. We remembered the story of Jesus returning to heaven. Then it was Easter, the story of the resurrection and the great resurrection appearances. But on Trinity Sunday, there is no story to illustrate or go with the theme of the day. There's no story. What's at the center of our thoughts today is an idea. The paradoxical idea that God is three and God is one.

Trinity Sunday is also a significant anniversary in my life as a priest. On Trinity Sunday in 1992, I was a very cocky young curate, fresh out of seminary. I'd just completed eight years of theological study and Trinity Sunday was going to be my opportunity to shine. So, I wrote a sermon to dazzle the congregation with my theological sophistication. I was going to treat them to some of the insights from my theological learning. And I'd prepared a whole slew of clever metaphors and analogies to help the people leave church that day with a very clear understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. I climbed the steps to the pulpit and started to preach.

It was about three and a half minutes into the sermon that I thought ... Well, I looked out and I realized that nobody was listening. Nobody was paying any attention. It was clear that nobody had the slightest idea what I was talking about. I'd completely lost them. And I'll never, ever forget that feeling. I've never felt so alone in a room full of people. So, I cut my losses, didn't finish the end of the sermon, mumbled a quick amen and skulked back to my pew. It was such a powerful and traumatizing experience that ever since then I'm barely able to climb the steps of a pulpit. And I think that's why I like to preach from here [*from the front of the chancel*]. The effects of Trinity Sunday 1992 are still with me.

I'm very mindful now that I stand before you, and it's not my job to impress you or to entertain you, it's my

role as a preacher to point my hearers towards a God who is holy, mysterious, beyond our grasp and ultimately beyond our understanding. The Trinity is not a problem to be solved by clever preachers. The Trinity is something to be worshiped and glorified. We began our service on a very appropriate note of praise: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come".

So, every year since when I haven't delegated preaching on Trinity Sunday to a colleague, which I have done more than I should have done over the years, I approach my preparation with great humility, recognizing that the truth and the mystery of God is always beyond us. And I'm mindful that we avoid the mistake of shaping God in our own image. But having said all that, let's turn to the story, the long story we had this morning from Genesis and see what that might teach us about what we can know about God. And what that story tells us is that our God is a creator God. God created the universe in which we live. He created the world and it was good. On the successive days of creation, the author of that story repeats the same refrain six times, that what God created is good.

Light, God saw that the light was good. Land and sea, God saw that it was good. Vegetation, God saw that it was good. Sun moon and stars, God saw that it was good. Living creatures and birds, God saw that it was good. Livestock and wild animals, God saw that it was good. Then on the sixth day, God saw all that he had made, and it was *very* good. Satisfied with this vast array of created goodness, on the seventh day, God rested from all his work.

Our understanding with the world, and actually with ourselves, needs to begin with the realization that what God created is fundamentally good. As Christians, we're not dualists. We ruled that out fairly on in our history. The idea that the spiritual realm is superior to the material, that we're to shun the material and just pursue the spiritual. We condemned that way of thinking as a heresy, because God's world, God's creation, God's material creation is fundamentally good. St. Paul reinforced that in one of his letters. He wrote, "Everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving."

The Genesis story depicts God as an artist. He pauses to reflect on his handiwork. The phrase "and he saw" comes time and time again. Before his creative work is done, God steps back to behold all that is taking shape before him. God's creation is a process. It took time. It evolved. God made something new each day and God's creative work is ongoing. It is not finished. God's creative work is unfolding still. And God's acts of creation involved all three persons of the Trinity. That's why the reading is set for today. At the beginning of the story, there's a reference to the wind from God. That's a word that's translated elsewhere as the breath of God or the spirit of God. It's the spirit of God that sweeps over the face of the waters.

And God created by saying, his word brings things into being. And the gospel writer John is very keen for us to realize that Jesus is God's word. His gospel starts by echoing this story from Genesis. He begins his gospel in the beginning to deliberately echo the creation story. "In the beginning," he says, "was the word and all things came into being through him." God created through his word. And it's this sense of a Trinitarian God at work in creation which makes sense of the verse which says ... And I don't know if you notice this, it's towards the end of the reading. We have a verse that says, "Then God said let us make humankind in our image." Interesting. It's a plural, that word that's used to describe God. God is an us. God is communal. God is made up of a network of relationships between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. That's why we say God is love. It's the power of love. It's love which holds those persons together, which binds them together in unity.

I've already said that we can't shape God in our image, but the reading makes it clear that we are made in God's image. And that has implications. We should stop to think about that. It means that we are part of God's creation and that we share in the goodness of God's creation. We as part of God's creation are fundamentally good. God looks at us, his people, and says, "It is good. It was very good." The Psalmist says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are not simply the result of a random collection of molecules banging into each other over time. We are individually created by God, lovingly.

The Psalms 100 says this, "Know that the Lord is God. It is he that has made us and we are his." We are his. One hears so much these days about people struggling with notions of identity or belonging. Who are we? Where do we belong? Who's our tribe? The Psalmist spells it out. "It is he that has made us and we are his." That's the beginning of a healthy and positive understanding of ourselves and our relationship to God and each other. We are part of God's creation, and it is good. We are part of God's creation, and we have a responsibility as humans to be part of God's creation.

God, we read in Genesis how God turned to humankind, created in his own image and said, "Here now, the world is yours. Populate it, steward it, manage it. Don't plunder, neglect, or exploit it." It's up to us to care for the goodness of God's gift of creation. And if God is Trinity, if God is interactive at God's very heart, if three is the deepest nature of the one, then what are we doing if we isolate ourselves from each other when we decide to go it alone, when we privilege independence and autonomy over companionship and mutuality, when we prioritize our individual rights over our care and concern for the most vulnerable amongst us?

If the Trinity really is more than some dusty old doctrine of the early church, then we should not take lightly the power and importance of the communal. God is relationship. And it is in relationship with ourselves, each other and the world that we experience and embody God's very nature. God is love. The Trinity is at heart an expression of the deep unfaltering and life-giving love between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Which begs the question, if God's very being is grounded in love and we are created in God's image, then who are we? What are we? Are we like the triune God whose imprint we bear, a creature motivated first and foremost by love? Is love what we are known for? If not, then what are we known for? What are we doing with our lives? What does our piety amount to?

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. Amen.