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Trinity Episcopal Church

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a
2 Corinthians 13: 11 - 13

Psalms 8
Matthew 28: 16 – 20

One alone

*is not by nature Love,
or Laugh,
or Sing*

ONE alone

*may be Prime Mover
Unknowable
Indivisible
All
and if Everything is All and All is One
One is Alone
Self-Centered
Not Love
Not Laugh
Not Sing*

TWO

*Ying/Yang
Dark/Light
Male/Female
contending Dualism
Affirming Evil/Good
And striving toward Balance
At best Face-to-Face
But never community*

THREE

*Face-to-Face-to-Face
Community
Ambiguity
Mystery
Love for the Other
And for the Other's Love
Within
Other-centered
Self-giving
Loving
Singing
Laughter
A fourth is created
Ever-loved and loving.*

Today is Trinity Sunday, the day when we celebrate one God in three persons, blessed Trinity. This poem by William Paul Young begins the foreword to Richard Rohr's book *The Divine Dance*, which is all about the Trinity. The metaphor for the Trinity throughout the book is Trinity as relationship, as

community, as dance – into which we are invited. Young goes on to note that whenever we even skim the edges of relationship, we acquiesce to mystery and we lose control. Marriage, he says, would be so much easier if there wasn't another person involved, but then it would be also be meaningless. Young notes that relationships are "entwined, entrenched, elusive, messy, enabling, enrapturing, maddening, exhilarating, frustrating, exposing and too beautiful for words." He uses the image of a painting as he says that relationships provide both the backdrop and the framing for the 'art of our lives.' Without relationship, 'the colors of our lives would simply disperse into the darkness, formless and void, awaiting the hovering of the Spirit to collect them and with Her [yes, Her] shades and hues, breathe into us to set them free.' Like sidewalk chalk paintings melting away in the rain.

In thinking about the Trinity as relationship, community, a dance, into which we are invited, let's look at this icon (done by the Vestry on retreat about 10 years ago) which hangs by the office door. It is a version of 15th century iconographer Andrei Rublev's work that depicts the three visitors (perhaps angels) who visit Abraham and Sarah under the Oaks of Mamre. But its more common title is The Old Testament Trinity.

When we look at it, we note that the three figures are sitting around the table like a television family – or like Da Vinci's Last Supper. In the theatre or in writing, that front side represents an invisible barrier between the action and the audience or reader, and it is known as the fourth wall. When a character speaks directly to the audience or reader, it's known as breaking the fourth wall. That's what Rublev's icon does. It breaks the fourth wall and invites us to pull up a chair at that same table with the three figures. We are invited into their table fellowship. That's what Richard Rohr says is always going on with the Trinity – they are continually reaching out to pull up a chair or take our hand and invite us into the dance.

In this icon (or at least in the original), three colors – gold, blue and green – predominate. Each one represents one of the facets – or persons – of God. For Rublev, gold symbolized God as Creator, Father, the first person of God. Gold was, for Rublev, the color of perfection, fullness, wholeness, the ultimate Source of Being.

Blue symbolized humanity in creation – the mirroring of sea and sky, and therefore Jesus, the Christ, taking on the world, taking on humanity. The two fingers which he holds up represent his two natures – fully human, fully divine.

Green, then, becomes the representation of the Holy Spirit. Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th century abbess, mystic, composer, poet, painter and doctor of the church, called the Holy Spirit's endless fertility and fecundity '*veriditas*,' a quality of divine life that makes everything blossom and flourish in endless variations of green. Likewise, Rublev, living three centuries after Hildegard, chose green to represent, in Rohr's words, 'the divine photosynthesis that grows everything from within by transforming light into itself.'

So here they are, the Trinity, gold, blue and green, sitting around this table with a place open just for us. Note that the figure representing the Spirit seems to be motioning us to the place provided. On the original icon, there are remains of an adhesive substance, and it is thought perhaps that Rublev originally included a mirror (a very unorthodox thing to do on an icon) right where this little box is in the front. That way, viewers, could see themselves in this table fellowship, this circular dance.

As many of you know, the concept of the Trinity is never explicitly stated in Scripture. There are lots of hints, like the beginning of our reading from Genesis. In it, the wind/breath/Spirit or the third person of God sweeps over the face of the waters (Eugene Peterson's *The Message: 'God's Spirit brood[s] like a bird above the watery abyss'*). And then God speaks Light into existence. We often refer to Jesus as the Word (capital W) of God. So in that very act of speaking Light into being, there is God the Creator, the first person of God, and there is the self-expression or Word of God, without whom not one thing comes into being, Jesus, the second person of God.

We in the Church are taught from a very young age that the idea of the Trinity is foundational to all that we believe as Christians. And then that is usually followed up by cautioning that we really shouldn't try to understand it because it can never be adequately explained. We should perhaps take comfort in the fact that it took the early church a couple of centuries to even come up with the language to describe the Christian experience of God as Trinity.

Over the centuries, lots of folks have tried to explain the Trinity, but the best we can really say is that it is a mystery. But mystery, Rohr says, is not something that we *cannot* understand. Rather it is something that we can endlessly understand. That is, we can never definitively say, "Okay, I got this Trinity thing whooped." Instead, we circle around the mystery, like a dance, dosey-doeing and weaving in and out. The closest we can ever get in understanding the Trinity is to say "The Trinity is *like*, or *similar to*..." The Trinity is *like* the three leaves of the shamrock. Or the Trinity is *similar to* the relationship of Lover, Beloved and Love.

For Rohr, the Trinity is *like* a dance. God is not a dancer, but the dance itself. A flow. A radical relatedness. A perfect communion between the Three. A circular current of divine love and profound grace. The Greek roots of the word 'metaphor' mean to 'carry across a meaning' in order to get from one place to another. In comparison to the reality, though, metaphors always fall somewhat short. Just as we fall short in trying to describe or explain the Godhead. But in the end, the only way we have of talking about God is metaphor. And that's how Jesus speaks – "the Kingdom of God is *like* a pearl of great price...the Kingdom of God is *like* a woman who finds a lost coin...God is *like* a king who invites everyone into a banquet..." None of them, or even all of them added together, adequately capture God or the Kingdom of God, and yet each of them has a part of the truth. Just like the metaphor of the dance. A dance to which we are invited.

"We believe in the Holy Spirit...who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son *he* is worshiped and glorified. So, is the Trinity an all-male bastion? Well, as we refer to it in the Nicene Creed, week in and week out, it certainly sounds like it. But, in the last few hundred – and perhaps especially the last fifty or so – years, as both our culture and the Church have moved in their understanding of the dignity and worth of women, more and more people are having trouble with the language being so male-centric. [W. P. Young's reference to Spirit as SHE] Rohr is among those who do. For him, the forms or manifestations of the Trinity appear to be masculine, but the 'diffused, intuitive, mysterious and wonderful unconscious in-between' appears to be feminine. And that in-betweenness is where the essential power is – not in the individual persons, but in the spaces, the relationships, in between. For Rohr, it's okay if someone wants to retain the masculine imagery of the persons of God, but only if they start unpacking, proclaiming, teaching and trying to understand the spaces in between. This is akin to a traditional Sufi saying, "*You think you understand one. You think you understand two, because one and one make two. You must also understand 'and.'*" For Rohr, the relationship, the dance, between the Three is the underlying feminine dimension of God, and it is in that space where Hildegard's *veriditas* - generativity, fecundity, new life - happen.

Meister Eckhart, a 14th century German Dominican mystic understood the Trinity this way:

Do you want to know what goes on in the core of the Trinity?

I will tell you.

In the core of the Trinity, the Father laughs and gives birth to the Son.

The Son laughs back at the Father and gives birth to the Spirit.

The whole Trinity laughs and gives birth to us.

O Holy and Undivided Trinity, One God, we can never even begin to comprehend you or understand you, but, yes, thank you, we'd love to have this dance with you.

In the words, once again, of Richard Rohr, let us pray.

God for us, we call you Father.

God alongside us, we call you Jesus.

God within us, we call you the Holy Spirit.

You are the eternal mystery that enables, enfolds and enlivens all things,

Even us and even me.

Every name falls short of your goodness and greatness.

We can only see who you are in what is.

We ask for such perfect seeing –

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.

Amen. +