

In Unity With the Holy Trinity

John 16:12-15
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Some years ago a Court of Appeals in Canada was hearing a case about a man accused of arson. The issue had to do with something he said that was picked up on microphone in a lower court's proceedings. During that trial, the accused arsonist had murmured under his breath, "O God, let me get away with it just this once." The judge ruled the incriminating remark was not admissible as evidence, since it was not, in his view, a public utterance, but rather a private conversation between two persons – the accused and God. The Appellate Court, however, ruled against this judgment, on the grounds that "God is not a person."

When this story was reported in the Guardian newspaper, the reporter added his own twist to the verdict, suggesting that Christians should agree with the Appellate Court since we believe that "God is not one person, but three," making the utterance a public conversation between the accused, the Son of God, the Holy Spirit and God the Father.

Today is Trinity Sunday, when we look at the relationship between the Son of God, the Holy Spirit, God the Father and us. Jesus spent a lot of time talking about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and today's New Testament lesson is no exception. Jesus says to the apostles, "(The Holy Spirit) will glorify me because he (the Holy Spirit) will take what is mine and (and the Father's) declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine," "For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Here Jesus is speaking of the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some think of this unity as a holy dance between the three persons of the Trinity. This dance is not like a couple dancing with such love as to shut out all the world, just the two of them lost in each other's arms.

No, the holy dance of the Trinity is a circle dance of three persons, beckoning all onlookers to join in the beauty, the joy, the movement, the love. Jane McAlister Pope, writing in The Charlotte Observer, says that the Trinity invites us to "come ... and join the dance." It's an invitation to be with God, says McAlister Pope, adding, "Yes, you can believe alone, and pray alone, and think great thoughts alone. But why miss out on the dance?"

Why miss out on the beauty, joy, movement and love of the dance of Holy Trinity? And what is it that we're missing out on? When we fail to appreciate and engage the fullness of the Holy Trinity, we miss out on the fullness of God and all that God has in store for us and for this world.

To underscore this, Jesus says, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” He said this to the apostles in the Upper Room, and he says it to us today, referring to the things Jesus has yet to reveal to us.

We don’t know what Jesus has yet to reveal to us, but we do know that we don’t know everything that’s to come. It’s anybody’s guess what is to come in this world, what tomorrow will hold. But if Jesus has anything to do with it, than surely it has to do with bringing us and all the world closer to God, closer to God’s vision of how things should be.

The way that God brings us and all the world closer to him is through the work of the Holy Spirit. “When the Spirit of truth comes,” says Jesus, “he will guide you into all the truth, ... and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” “... Guide you into all the truth.” This suggests that we don’t fully know the truth, we don’t fully know what’s right and what’s wrong, we can’t be sure that our understanding and belief about what true and what’s a lie is accurate. In fact, we may be way off in our beliefs and actions when it comes to the truth as God knows it.

Given the state of things these days, we really need the Spirit of truth to guide us, don’t we? And we need to ask ourselves, are we truly open to be guided by the Holy Spirit, as individuals, as communities, as nations?

It’s the Holy Spirit that inspired the scriptures of the Bible, the Holy Spirit that puts the Living Word of Christ in our hearts, the Holy Spirit that prays to God on our behalf, the Holy Spirit through whom we work in concert with God to bring the fullness of the kingdom into being.

So, the question is what do we need to hear and receive today from the Holy Spirit? Like the apostles, we sometimes aren’t ready and able to hear what Jesus has to say to us. Like the apostles, we need to be more open to the Spirit of truth?

If God is most fully and authentically expressed in the unity of the Trinity, perhaps we are more fully ourselves, more fully aligned with the truth when we come together in unity, in the dance of the Holy Trinity, as children of God, followers of Christ, brothers and sister in the Spirit of God.

Rather than focusing on what separates us as family members with different personalities and agendas, as voters staunchly aligned with different political factions, as social and economic classes with different wants and needs, as nations with opposing values and goals – rather than focusing on what separates us, wouldn’t we be better off focusing on what unities us as fellow human beings when God calls the beloved of all creation? Yes, of course, we would be better off focusing on what unites us in Christ. And to do that, we have to be open to the Spirit of truth – the spirit of truth that God has sent to be with us, the spirit of Truth that guides us into all the truth.

Jesus says the Spirit of truth “will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears (from God).” This means that if your truth is not based on God’s word – as revealed through study, prayer and discernment with other Christians – than your truth has not yet passed the Spirit-of-truth test, and it should be held gently and loosely, rather than emphatically with confrontation.

Jesus says the Spirit of truth “will declare to you the things that are to come.” This means that if your truth does not result in building up the kingdom of God, than it has not yet passed the Spirit-of-truth test, and it should be held gently and loosely rather than emphatically with confrontation.

And Jesus says the Spirit of truth will glorify him. This means that if your truth does not point to Jesus – if your truth points only to yourself, only to your wants, only to your own beliefs and attitudes – than your truth has not yet passed the Spirit-of-truth test, and it should be gently and loosely held rather than used as a weapon against others.

Jesus says elsewhere in John (8:32), “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” That’s the good news of the gospel! In Christ, we are made free, freer than we can even imagine – free to love, free to serve, free to rejoice, free to live, to live in unity with one another, in unity with family and friends, unity with all people of godly character, unity with all creatures of the earth, and unity with the new thing that God is even now bringing into being, the new and beautiful thing that the Spirit of truth is even now guiding us to become, if we would listen. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, you form one communion as three persons. You fill our hearts with the promise of new life.

You redeem us by forgiving our sin and making us new. You sustain us in times of trial and call us forth as instruments of your peace.

For these good gifts, we are thankful.

May we know that you, as three persons in one purpose, provide all that we could ever need or want.

With your blessing, you help us attain new heights of faith, compassion and connection with others.

May we come to know you and experience you more fully in community with one another and in communion with you as the Three-in-One.

Lord, there are people in our family of faith who need your Spirit of care and compassion, healing and new life, fresh hope and the promise of better things to come.

Help us to be instruments of these blessings, even as we rely on you to minister to the needs of others, especially those dealing with health issues. We pray for those we've kept in prayer these many weeks. We pray all this in Jesus name, as he taught, saying together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.