

Rev. Kimberly Glenn

In the name of our triune God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On this glorious morning we celebrate Trinity Sunday. Last week was Pentecost Sunday. What's going on here with all these liturgically significant days? I mean, aren't the most significant days in our common Christian experience supposed to be Christmas Day and Easter Sunday? Well, yes and no. I mean it is truly important to acknowledge and celebrate the birth and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Jesus didn't want all of this to be just about him. Jesus himself made every effort to emphasize that everything that we see in him is also there in our God, the God that he referred to as Abba, as his Father. Last Sunday we celebrated the acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit among us, the Holy Spirit that enlivens our gifts and allows us to use each one of them for the benefit of our communities; the communities where we live and work and play out our one and only lives.

Today we acknowledge the articulated union of God as the combination, maybe a better word is fusion, of all three of the ways that we perceive God being in us, with us and for us. In the Genesis reading of the creation story we acknowledge God as the foundation of all that is, seen and unseen; the maker of our cosmos, our planet home, and all living things including **us**, our whole selves. In the Gospel reading from Matthew we acknowledge the authority of Christ; the Son of God who lived among us, who was one of us. He was the one who came to show us how to live life to its fullest meaning; showing us that we can never be separated from the love of God. And in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we learn that the Holy Spirit that moves among us is sent to draw us together in peaceful and loving community.

But a peaceful and loving community is *not* what Paul had encountered there in the church in Corinth. He found a community that was fractured; one where people were at odds with each other; people who disagreed about what exactly it meant to follow Christ. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Aren't Christians at large at odds over what it means to be Christian in our world today? There are so very many different ways to worship; a variety of denominational creeds and dogmas draw distinct lines between Christians today.

The people in Corinth struggled in much the same way. You see, Corinth was a melting pot of cultural differences. It was a vibrant port city where people from all over the world interacted. When there is the possibility of human interaction there is the possibility of influence of ideas. It seems that some people who proclaimed Christ differently from the way Paul proclaimed Christ had come into the church in Corinth that Paul had helped to establish. These interlopers were able to persuade some of the people in the church away from Paul's understanding of Christ. In the body of this letter Paul had much to say about these interlopers. He refers to them in the letter as "superapostles." These "superapostles", it seems, were selling a brand of Christianity that they claimed was much more worthy of their commitment than Paul's brand. According to Paul, the "superapostles" spoke more eloquently than he did and they claimed superior competence through their approach. In other words, in Paul's view the "superapostles" were slick and the product they were selling was not genuine faith it was a rip off. The message they promoted looked great, it sounded wonderful but in reality it failed to produce the kind of community that God intends for us. The "superapostles" succeeded at disrupting the peace and were attempting to destroy the community. In today's terms, what

the “superapostles” brought in was like a virus in spam mail, destroying all it attacks from the inside out.

Obviously this threat of unorthodox persuasion exists in the Christian church today. This threat also affects other orientations of worship like Judaism and Islam. We see it alive in the sects of fundamentalism in the world. But this threat also exists outside religious communities in the human to human political world in which we live. For all of us, what matters is how our faith informs how we act in the world.

This past week I was on vacation with my husband and another couple. Charles and I were introduced to each other by this couple and the four of us have been friends for over 40 years. Charles and I have chosen a life of robust faith. Our friends have chosen to find meaning in the world outside faith. We are great friends, but our approach to life and especially to faith is very different. On our trip we ran into the mother of all storms in Dallas. We were due to connect there with our flight to Colorado Springs. Our approaches to the challenges that storm presented were completely different. We did not judge each others’ approach, but I observed the differences.

Our friends saw the ensuing challenges as a personal affront to them. All four of us endured cancelled flights, changed flights and baggage lost for three days. They got angry with the staff and they let the staff know how displeased they were. Our approach was to view it from the perspective of the staff. They were enormously outnumbered by frustrated and impatient customers. We thought the staff did an amazing job of rerouting every single one of those customers in the most timely way that they could. My friends felt they were being misled and imposed upon by the uninformed and unhelpful staff. We communicated with the baggage claims office with courtesy, understanding that they

were handling the confusion as best they could. While the four of us were at lunch one day, still waiting for baggage to be delivered, we received a courtesy call from the baggage claim office letting us know where our bags were and approximately when they would be delivered. Our friends were amazed, even shocked, that they had not received a similar call.

Ultimately we all received our luggage. The four of us handled the situation with a large dose of humility and humor. But the way we treated those who were working on our behalf was grounded in something bigger than ourselves. Charles and I ground our living and being in the words of Jesus, love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Our friends were grounded in the understandable human ethic of “my needs first, my neighbor’s needs second”. Charles and I love our friends unconditionally. We had an excellent time with them. I just pray that they might someday love God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as much and as completely as God loves them. It is not easy to know that outside of belonging to a worshipping community; a community where God’s love is acknowledged with worshipful expressions of gratitude for his grace and mercy.

In order to grasp the meaning of the Trinity, it is important that we be able to see things from a larger perspective; to be able to step back from the particular cause of tension and try to see things as God would see them. In his letter to the Corinthians, this is the approach Paul takes. After arguing the particulars, Paul concludes his letter to the people of Corinth whom he loves with a comprehensive trinitarian benediction. His hope is that they will see that in their life together the Holy Three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are active and moving among them. In his other letters, Paul concludes with a benedic-

tion that references the grace of Christ. This letter, though, includes reference to our wider understanding of God that we know as the Holy Trinity. Paul's last words to them are the ones you heard this morning. Paul said, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." In those words, Paul is telling the people of Corinth that through their faith they are empowered to draw upon *wider and deeper* resources to work through their conflicts. In addition to the grace available to them in Christ, they have access to the unremitting love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about healthy relationship among them.

My friends, the church community is the safest community I know in which to learn to access these resources. As I witnessed in my recent travels, accessing these resources does not come naturally. We need to be trained to live into our faith. The church community is filled with people of differing ages and stages of life, differing political persuasions, differing family and educational backgrounds, and differing wants and needs. But it is here in this community where we can all witness to the power of God's love, God's grace and God's power through the Spirit that holds us all in communion in spite of our differences. It is here in this community where we can trust that we are grounded in the basic Christian tenet of loving God and neighbor before ourselves.

As we approach the Lord's table today, be aware that God's Holy Spirit draws us into this communion. We pray that God will receive us just as we are. And I pray that as each of you offers all that you are to God, God will transform you through the sacrament, drawing you more fully into the body of Christ. Then, according to the benediction, I pray that you will go into the world newly infused with the love of God, the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.