

Trinity Sunday – Year A, Genesis 1 and Matthew 28  
All Saints' Episcopal Church  
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Our culture influences what we consider desirable or good; we see this when we look at the differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures. In individualistic cultures, the well-being of the individual is more highly valued than that of a group or of society in general. Someone from this type of culture is typically looked upon favorably if they are self-reliant, unique, strong, and independent. Collectivist cultures, on the other hand, are those that stress generosity, dependability, loyalty, and the good of the group or society over an individual's good. When asked to describe themselves, those from individualist cultures are more likely to use personal characteristics ("I am strong") while those from a collectivist cultures are more likely to describe themselves using the roles they play in a group – like "I am a loyal husband" or "I am a kind friend."<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, the United States is considered an individualistic culture. We get a sense of pride in knowing that we can do something all by ourselves. Just look at all the "DIY" or do-it-yourself books and TV shows – there's the do-it-yourself wedding, do-it-yourself car repair, do-it-yourself home renovation. At the same time that social networking and globalization emphasize our interconnectedness and dependence upon one another, we still hold up independence and self-sufficiency as the ideal, as the image of perfection. And we see this same correlation of self-sufficiency with perfection in the way we understand God.

Many theologians, both the armchair and the formally-trained varieties, bristle if someone raises the possibility that maybe, just maybe, God created the world to fulfill some need that God has for companionship or relationship. Certainly God doesn't *need* us, we say – God doesn't need anything or anyone. After all, God is *God*. But maybe today is the perfect day in the church calendar to question this assumption many of us have about God.

Today is Trinity Sunday, a day when we take a closer look at who God is within God's self, at how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit fit together to make the one God that we worship. It's a good thing that the Church sets aside a day to talk about the Trinity, because the doctrine of the Trinity can be hard to understand: How can three persons make one God? How can they share the same essence, be co-eternal, and be equal in power, and yet be three distinct entities? I'll never forget someone making an appointment to talk with me, and when we sat down in my office she started with: "Now, explain to me again why we Christians are not polytheists?" I get it. The Trinity is a difficult thing to comprehend, and so we have a tendency to talk about the Trinity without ever letting this doctrine sink in and transform our deepest understanding of who God is.

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<sup>1</sup> Kendra Cherry, "Individualistic Cultures and Behaviors," *verywellmind*, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-individualistic-cultures-2795273>, posted March 24, 2020.

Even though we talk about the Trinity, too often we have this image of a solitary God, an individual, who *chooses* to create us and to love us—as if God were alone and then one day decided to create the world in order to have something to love and, voilà, the first relationship was born. But that image doesn't really capture the truth; because what we see when we look at the Trinity is that there is this kind of eternal relationship, or friendship, that exists within God—a sharing of love and self between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that makes all other relationships possible. See, relationship isn't something that God *does* or *chooses*, relationship is what God *is* and has always been. Relationship isn't a sign of neediness or incompleteness—instead, it's built into the very framework of perfection we call God.

In his book *Love Wins*, Rob Bell says this about who God is and what that tells us about how we came to be:

God is love.  
And love *is* a relationship.  
That relationship is one of joy, and it can't be contained.

Like when you see something amazing and you turn to those you're with and say, "Isn't this great?" Your question is an invitation for them to join you in your joy. The amazement you are experiencing can't be contained; it spills over the top; it compels you to draw others into it. You have to share it.

God creates, because the endless joy and peace and shared life at the heart of this God knows no other way.<sup>2</sup>

God didn't create the world because God needed to. And God didn't create the world because God stood back and made this studied, rational decision that creating the world was the right thing to do. Instead, God created the world because God is love, and that's what love does. Love spills over; it overflows. Love breeds love; it makes more of itself.

No wonder our lessons for this Trinity Sunday are about new beginnings. We look at the creation story in Genesis, and we read back into it glimpses of the Trinity. God the Father speaks the Word while the Spirit blows over the face of the waters and a world is created, a world God declares "good," a world that comes into being through the love that exists within God. In Matthew we hear Jesus telling the eleven disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The disciples have themselves experienced something of who God is, and what are they supposed to do? Go out and invite others to experience that same love, to be baptized and walk in newness of life. Love is by nature creative; it always creates more of itself.

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<sup>2</sup> *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* by Rob Bell. New York: HarperOne, 2011, page 178.

We see this theology in our Episcopal marriage service. We pray that God will give the couple getting married such fulfillment in their mutual affection that they will be able to reach out in love and concern for others. All marriages – whether they include children or not – are by nature generative. The same is true of the love within a friendship, a family, or a community of believers. The love we have for one another should spill out into the world around us; it should strengthen our relationships with others in the world; it should empower us to imagine more, believe more, and give more of ourselves than we ever could otherwise.

This is why the Church can't be silent on issues of racial injustice. When I watch the news and I see groups of peaceful protesters in the streets, I see people who are angry, people who are disillusioned, people who have experienced racial injustice firsthand and those who have perpetuated it, people of different races and ages and sexual orientation. But most of all I see people who love; after all, it's been said that justice is what love looks like in public.

I look at the peaceful protests and I see what the Church has represented for thousands of years. In the second and third centuries, Christians would go out into the woods, find abandoned babies, and raise them as their own. Quakers and other Christians worked with the Underground Railroad to help slaves escape to freedom. Numerous Christians concealed Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Episcopalian seminarian Jonathan Daniels was working for civil rights in Alabama when he was killed, jumping in front of seventeen-year-old Ruby Sales and taking the bullet intended for her. When we participate in the love that is at the core of God's very own life, then we can't help but let that love flow through us and into the world around us. Social justice is that love in a public sphere.

That's the creative, generative, and fertile nature of true love—it is what brings the world into being, it is what sustains the world every second of every day. The love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit spills over, continuing to create the world, continuing to make all things new. And having been baptized into the life of God, we are called to participate in this creative, generative love – we are called to be co-creators with God in making the kingdom of heaven present in tangible, meaningful ways. On this Trinity Sunday, it's worth asking ourselves: Are we living up to our calling?

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<sup>3</sup> Shannon Evans, "The Truth about Christian Justice," *Huffpost*, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-truth-about-the-church-and-social-justice\\_b\\_9010726](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-truth-about-the-church-and-social-justice_b_9010726), updated January 19, 2017.