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Trinity C
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Today in the life of the Church we celebrate Trinity Sunday, an understanding of the complex nature of God that is not spelled out specifically anywhere in the the Old Testament, or the New Testament. The evolution of this Trinitarian understanding of God is a good example of exactly what the Gospel speaks too today when Jesus tells his disciples, “I have things left to say that at this point you just won’t understand, but the Holy Spirit of truth will come later and reveal these truths to you.” (paraphrased) And I’d argue that that Spirit of truth is still helping us to understand truths. I’d like to think that the Holy Spirit of Truth has helped our Church maneuver many of our conflictive issues of the last 25 - 30 years.

I have long abandoned all the various metaphors for illustrating the plurality of a monotheistic God, like water, H₂O being in three forms, liquid, ice, and steam, or an egg being a shell, a white, and a yolk, or maybe the dumbest of all that I ever heard of, the Trinity is like three-in-one shampoo; cleanses, cures dandruff, and conditions your hair, three activities in one substance.

I suspect we come closer to understanding the Trinity in a useful way not when we box it in rationally like diagramming a sentence, or illustrating what we think it means via some clever metaphor, but rather when we simply embrace and experience the Trinity, the unity and gathered diversity of God as creator, redeemer, sustainer, as Parent, Child, and Holy Spirit gathered family.

Today’s scriptures lend themselves to that kind of experiential dynamic. Paul’s bold claim that yes, indeed we are justified by faith, standing in Grace, boasting in our hope of sharing in God’s glory. But not just that, but confident of that hope to the point that we can boast in our suffering. Anyone can boast at the possibility of glory or success, but Paul is saying that we can even boast in those worst occurrences, when we are suffering, because God through Jesus Christ enables us to live in the sure and certain hope and divine knowledge “that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” What a redemptive and mystical formula to live our lives and pilgrimage; suffering to endurance to character to hope because of God’s love through the Holy Spirit.

However, let me be very clear, not for a minute do I believe that God’s sends suffering in an attempt to either punish or even to ignite this mystical, transformative process. But God does **redeem** the suffering of this world, God does **redeem** the suffering of our lives that we either create or simply happens to us. Suffering transformed into endurance transformed into character transformed into hope because of God’s love incarnate in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It rings true to me because I’ve lived it.

And yes I did use the word mystical but I didn’t say magical. Living the Christian life is

not magic like one of those good lookin guys on TV will try to sell you with a broad car salesman smile; “y’all just join up and become one of my prayer partners by sending us fifty dollars a month and your life will be prosperous and rosy.” It doesn’t take a refined sense of Trinitarian theology to see through that. It’s not just bad teaching, it’s a lie out of the pits of hell. I guess you don’t hear that in an Episcopal pulpit very often.

Frederick Buechner describes well this evolved Christian hope and this same pilgrimage we live as humans:

“Then at last we see what hope is and where it comes from, hope as the driving power and outermost edge of faith. Hope stands up to its knees in the past and keeps its eyes on the future. There has never been a time past when God wasn't with us as the strength beyond our strength, the wisdom beyond our wisdom, as whatever it is in our hearts--whether we believe in God or not--that keeps us human enough at least to get by despite everything in our lives that tends to wither the heart and make us less than human. To remember the past is to see that we are here today by grace, that we have survived as a gift.”¹

Suffering to endurance to character to hope, Suffering to endurance to character to hope, Suffering to endurance to character to hope, justified by faith, experiencing God’s peace, standing in Grace, God’s love in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit redeeming and transforming our lives, our community, and the world. AMEN.

¹ Buechner, Fraderick. from the sermon “A Room Called Remember.”