

Sermon
Trinity Sunday
June 4th, 2023
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: GENESIS 1:1-2:4A; PSALM 8; 2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-13; MATTHEW 28:16-20

When I was studying at St. Paul university, one of my supervisors, in offering me feedback about a paper I'd written, said "it needs one more turn". She meant that I needed to take what I'd written and turn it over so that the words – ideas, perspective – came together in a different way. She was right. Since then, when puzzling things out – either writing, or discussing – I've often found myself thinking "Hmm...one more turn...".

Often times as I'm reading Scripture, I have this senses of turning. There is a shifting as words – ideas, perspective – shift things in me and in how I view myself and world. Each week, as we listen to Scripture – and sermon – as we grapple with the Gospel, it's "one more turn". "One more turn", as we search for the living word for us, here and now...

Today our lectionary brings us words – ideas, perspective – from Genesis, from Psalm 8, from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, from Matthew's Gospel. There is more to grapple with than the Gospel, today, though: we've also, on this Trinity Sunday, got doctrine to dissect. That's often what happens from the pulpit on this day in the church year. Metaphors as we wrestle with an abstract concept, as the mystery of the Three-In-One bends our minds.

What if the Trinity is not just doctrine? Not just an abstract concept to be wrestled with, or a mystery to bend our minds? What if the Trinity is more than metaphor: more than waterwheels of love, more than a Divine Dance? I am a great lover of metaphor, but what if the doctrine of the Trinity is waiting for us to give it "one more turn"?

That's what the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault – Episcopal priest, modern-day mystic, author – would have us do. In her book "The Holy Trinity and the Law of

Three” she offers an invitation, to turn the Trinity from **concept** into **practice**, using the Law of Three.

She tells this story in the book. A couple, sad that their son has moved far away, are delighted when they receive from him the gift of a cabinet that seems to be just what they need to serve as a tea cupboard. They happily display their teacups in it. One day, as they serve tea to a guest, he notices that for a tea cupboard it’s awfully short on actual shelf space. He comments on this and asks if he can have a closer look. He turns it around and finds he can remove a couple of packing pieces from the back. Upon doing that, the cupboard swings open to reveal a Ham Radio. A gift, not to display teacups, but to connect the couple with their son, and indeed, with the world...

Early in her ministry Bourgeault found herself asking: why does a religion whose center is in transforming unitive love, always tend to express itself in judgement, rigidity, self-protection and polarization? She suggests that the dimension that has been identified as “witnessing presence” was – is – missing. If everyone goes through life thinking that their ego self is the self that God had created and redeems through Jesus, all we can do is push and bounce each other around. There is no leverage to get people to step back from their personality, their fixed positions, their fixed theologies to get an awareness not only of what they believe but what they are doing in a moment and what might come next.

She uses the analogy of sailing: we might think that the keel in the water and the wind in the sails is what propels the boat forward, but it’s not. Wind and water are the first two forces. A third force of a helmsperson is needed! This is the law of three. Three forces must interweave successfully for that boat to move through the water.

Our Gospel passage this morning: at first glance we might wonder what this has to do with the Trinity. This passage is a commissioning: for the disciples, and for us. Sadly, this passage has been interpreted and put into practice without the “witnessing presence” that Bourgeault talks about, and it has led to pushing and bouncing around (to say the least) as Christians through the ages have followed a call to baptize, to make new disciples. We have an opportunity to consider our own commissioning. How are we called to link our experiences and encounters with God with how we encounter others? With how we encounter and experience our

world? We are called, as followers of Jesus, not to rigid pushing and bouncing around, but to be mediating and reconciling forces in the world. We have an opportunity to let the Trinity and the law of three infuse our way of inviting others to experience the love of God made known in Jesus, and at work through the Spirit in the world.

Bourgeault asserts that the Trinity is primarily about process, describing it as encapsulating a paradigm of change and transformation based on the Law of Three: an ancient metaphysical principle.¹ Most of the world's metaphysical paradigms are binary: paired opposites like male and female, light and dark, yin and yang. In a ternary system, the interplay of the polar opposites calls forth a third mediating or reconciling force which generates a synthesis at a whole new level. Affirming, denying and reconciling forces work together – they are successfully interwoven – to create a new arising, a new dimension. We can use this principle in many ways. We get into impasses when we get stuck in a model of two. With the interweaving of a third force, comes change and transformation.

Our passage from Genesis offers us the creation story. This story invites us to consider *how* God creates because God is still creating, and we are invited to join in and to be – as Bruce Epperly always says – to be “co-creators”. God is creating beauty out of chaos, and we are invited to do that too.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes this:

“Some days God comes as a judge, walking through our lives wearing white gloves and exposing all the messes we have made. Other days God comes as a shepherd, fending off our enemies and feeding us by hand. Some days God comes as a whirlwind who blows all our certainties away. Other days God comes as a brooding hen who hides us in the shelter of her wings. Some days God comes as a dazzling monarch and other days as a silent servant. If we were to name all the ways God comes to us, the list would go on forever: God the teacher, the challenger, the helper, the stranger, God the lover, the adversary, the yes, the no.”

This invites us to consider all the ways that we can be a mediating and reconciling

¹ Bourgeault, Cynthia. *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* (p. 15). Shambhala. Kindle Edition.

force in the world. It invites us to consider all the ways that we might create beauty out of chaos. All the ways that we might bring about change and transformation.

In the Letter to the Corinthians, Paul is writing as a pastor, wrestling with how diverse groups of people can share in the same church body. How is it that groups who have been radically different from one another in religious practices, language and history can be part of the church?

This passage brings us the words of our greeting when we gather:
“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

This reminds us to look for the force that will make way for relationship, transformation and change in all our encounters. Will it be grace that will be that reconciling force? Will it be love? Three forces keep things moving. It’s never “us and God” or “us and them”: the Spirit is always there as that third force, keeping things moving, keeping things “turning”. Making way for unity in the midst of diversity.

Western Christianity is “turning”. Some would say that it is turning in on itself. What if the Trinity, rather than a doctrine to be believed is waiting for us to give it “one more turn”? Waiting for us to find the Ham radio in it, turning it into a way of living and communicating in community, and in creation: a way that will transform church and world? What if the Trinity is waiting for us to stop pushing and bouncing each other around – inviting us to step back from our personalities, and fixed positions, our fixed theologies, to get an awareness not only of what we believe but what we are doing in a moment and what might come next?

We have, at the center of our faith, a symbol in the Trinity, of transforming, interweaving, unitive love. May we use this symbol to interweave that same love into every aspect of our lives. In Jesus name. Amen.