

Pentecost 1  
Trinity Sunday  
Genesis 1:1  
Matthew 28

6/7/2020

Sermon by The Rev. Lex Breckinridge

Today is the first Sunday after Pentecost. It's also the day we call Trinity Sunday. The day that we intentionally reflect on one of the central – and most deeply misunderstood – doctrines of the church. How can this doctrine – that the God we trust and believe is Three Persons in one and the Person is Three – isn't your head already hurting? How can this abstract doctrine speak to us in this time of double pandemic – a time of physical sickness in the form of COVID-19 and the spiritual and societal sickness that has been made so evident that we can't turn away from it as we try to absorb the shock of the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbury, and the list goes on. In these profoundly anxious times when isolation, loneliness, bitterness, and rancor are so pervasive, in a time when hearts are broken and grief and holy anger give rise to both solidarity and division, I believe The Trinity can help us find a way forward.

That's because The Trinity casts a vision of God as profoundly relational. It took a few hundred years of reflection on Scripture, Jesus, and the work of The Holy Spirit for the image of The Trinity to emerge so we shouldn't expect to get it so easily ourselves. Jesus' earliest followers had the experience of meeting God directly when they met Jesus. Yet, they also heard Jesus speak of God as distinct. He prayed to God. He said he came from God and would return to God. Yet he was also one with God. So there was both a "twoness" and a "oneness" about God. And Jesus also described the Spirit as coming from God but also being distinct from both him and God. So over time, the church began to think of God as both Three *and* One. Not just One because that would miss out on Jesus and the Spirit and not Three because that would miss God's oneness. So this deeply poetic and highly metaphorical vision arose. God wasn't just "up there." God was down here and God was everywhere. God got the whole show going and God was in the midst of the show, creating, redeeming and sustaining everything.

The beautiful image I have of The Trinity is an image of relationship. An image of the Three in a divine dance – the image of the Three in an ongoing and eternal divine conversation. A dance and a conversation which I – and you and all of us – are always invited to join. And the divine dance and the holy conversation always calls *us* into relationship with *one another*. It always calls us to holy justice and divine love. And, you know, these relationships aren't just things that we *do*. Relationships – person to person, neighbor to neighbor, group to group – these relationships are who we *are as human beings*. If our relationships are healthy, then we're healthy. If our relationships are broken, then we're broken.

So in these times of isolation and loneliness and grief and holy anger at injustice, repairing – building – relationships is the way forward. And a basic, irreducible step in repairing any relationship begins with listening. Really listening to another human being or another group of human beings. Deeply listening to their stories. Learning as well as we all can the texture, the feel, the reality of their lives.

Fr. Greg Boyle is a Jesuit priest who founded Homeboy Industries in South Central Los Angeles. He was moved by the stories of heartbreak and loss of that impoverished, largely Hispanic residence of this community. And so in 1998, he started Homeboys to walk alongside human beings who suffered from the cycles of poverty, drugs, gangs, and incarceration. Today, Homeboys is one of the most visibly transformative communities in the country. We read the Homeboys story a couple of years ago in Fr. Boyle's book, *Tattoos on the Heart*. A line from that book has always stuck with me. Greg says, "It would seem that, quite possibly, the ultimate measure of health in any community might well reside in our ability to stand in awe at what folks have to carry rather than in judgment at how they carry it."

Learning what another human being carries requires deep and respectful listening. We have been sharing our stories of life in these times here at St. Thomas lately. I love them all. There is a story I received from Anne Bentley a couple of days ago that speaks to this present moment so beautifully. Let me share it with you. Anne says:

*I have just been reading the latest installment and enjoy hearing from others in our community. And then to Facebook where I found this post from my friend and fellow Bellevue parent, whose son is in class at BHS with Katherine.*

*This really hit me – acknowledging we have a big problem is one thing. But understanding how it impacts a person close to you is something far different. I'd like to say I didn't even think of this being an issue for her family as I don't see her as different in any way. But the reality is probably more that I live in a world where problems of race seem more remote and I assume they don't affect me directly. So it's all too easy to stick my head in the sand...*

*Although she is not a member of St. Thomas, I wanted to share her story with you anyway as it seems very poignant at the moment. The story begins:*

*"You clearly remember the first time you were called the n-word. You were probably alone...or outnumbered...and in my case and others, a child. Our parents knew it was coming and tried to prepare us, shield us, through hard work, nice neighborhoods and education – but it still finds you. And when it does, there is loss and a depth of pain and fear that grips you. There is something in the deliverer's eyes that exposes their heart – a chilling reminder of a history that tells you, you are less than, that you don't matter. My brother and I shared our stories yesterday. We talked about how his dry clothing ended up peed on in a toilet, when our local swim/rec center finally allowed its first Black members. He was eight. We talked about how recess got wrecked, kids throwing the n-word around like grenades, after watching "Roots." Or how despite our Dad being an officer, the Black army families still had to live outside of the base. We talked about boyfriends/girlfriends breaking up with us when parents found out that we were Black, despite our stellar GPAs, varsity athletics and military manners. We talked about the time I came back to a boyfriend's fraternity and found "n\*\*\*\*\*lover" written on his door. We talked about how a neighbor called the police when they saw my son jogging from a friend's back to home, only five houses away. We have these and far too many, other stories. But despite it all, the events of the last few weeks, and having yet another painful conversation with our kids, today I cling to hope. I have hope because brave friends, neighbors and teachers are reaching out...asking and checking in, not stymied by the fear of "saying the wrong thing." I have hope because people are rejecting silence. I have hope because the history our kids are learning is a new, broadened history, with a more inclusive perspective of the past. They are watching "13th,"*

*discussing Emmett Till, and actually taking the test that Black people were forced to take to keep them from voting. Shout out to the BSD. I have hope because while we desperately...Lord, help us...need new laws, policy and further education, we already have the power to take the first step – to look within our hearts. This may be the toughest part. It's going to take being brave and not waiting for someone else to fix this. Drum roll...it's going to take knowing and loving your neighbor. Maybe we start with asking someone who doesn't look like us to go on a walk...and when possible...invite them/their family over for dinner. Could be just asking a person of color, "How are you doing?" being prepared to really listen. Thank you to SO many of you that are already leaning into this step. It IS hard, potentially unknown territory and means so much. I'm spending a lot of time praying and just plain looking up right now. What if our hope from above gains momentum from below? What if it's up to each of us to ask questions that allow voices to start, to feel heard? This is A MESS. Heart wrenching. We can all agree on that. It took a long time to get here. Please pray, sign petitions, change.org is amazing, peacefully protest and know that I am looking forward to having you over. I'll tell you all about my hair."*

I stand in awe of what Anne's friend is carrying. And you know I should probably just sit down right now. But I'll make one last observation. This story is exactly the story I needed today. It's from the heart, deeply and authentically real, and it's invitational. It calls us into relationship. And relationships – healthy, honest, vulnerable relationships = that's where we'll meet The Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

I'm going to let Presiding Bishop Michael Curry have the last word: "Now is the time to commit to honoring the dignity and infinite worth of every child of God. Now is the time for all of us to show – in other words, our actions, and our lives – what love really looks like."