

Trinity Sunday, Year A  
Genesis 1:1-2:4a  
May 18, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, California

A Most Improbable Day:  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

Today is Trinity Sunday—one of the principle feasts of the church year, there in line with Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. How odd that a day celebrating a point of doctrine would be included in the company of the defining moments of our Christian tradition. I wonder why it's there.

Of course we celebrate Christmas. It's the core of our faith. God breaking in to daily life. How does the hymn put it—God in man made manifest. And who would question Easter—the triumph of life over death, the Risen Christ here among us once again. Can we even imagine a vital faith without Pentecost—the pouring out of God's spirit on all flesh? Of course not. But Trinity Sunday—how improbable. Or is it?

Could it be that Trinity Sunday calls our attention to the very essence of our faith and hence to the core of our being? I wonder.

Trinity Sunday stops us in our tracks and asks us to look closely at the nature of God, to look closely at the notion of the Trinity, to look closely at the Triune God.

Since the earliest days of our faith tradition, people have been grappling with how to convey what they know and have experienced of God. In the third century, Tertullian, perhaps the first to use the term "Trinity" when referring to God, spoke of God as "ice, liquid and steam—sun, ray and light"—diverse, distinct but in relationship.

Two centuries later, Augustine conceived of the Triune God as "memory, understanding and will." In the middle ages Aquinas saw God as "Love Originating, Love Responding, Love Uniting." In our own time theologian Sally McFague speaks of God as "Mother, Lover and Friend."

Each in their own way saying that God is more—more than one image, more than one force, more than one substance and yet God is also one. Each in their own way pointing to a truth about God that simply cannot be contained in one image or word or concept. Each in their own way drawing our attention to the Triune God—God who at base is Being in relationship, Unity in diversity, Love outpouring.

Think of it: at God's very core is relationship, communion, diversity!

And we, you and I, are made in the image of God. You and I and all humanity are made in the image of the Triune God. Sit with that a minute. Woven into the threads of our DNA is the image of God—God who at the core is in relationship with God's self and all

creation; God who at the center is—as Aquinas puts it, “Love originating, Love responding, Love uniting.”

The thread of individualism runs so deep in our culture that we tend to see ourselves as individuals made in the image of God—God’s imprint on you, God’s imprint on me. But I wonder—I wonder if our understanding of the Triune God calls us to a different understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God.

For at its core, being made in the image of the Triune God means being in relationship—from the get go. Think of it: we become most fully who we are—bearers of the image of God—when we do so in relationship with one another.

We can’t really do this on our own. We need one another. It is in community—communion if you will—that we grow into who we are called to be; it is in community that we become full bearers of the image of God. Think of the people in your life who have called out in you that which is most uniquely you. Remember also those who in challenging you, disagreeing with you, downright annoying you have helped you become who you are. God in relationship. Unity in diversity. Communion in community.

How strange this must sound to ears accustomed to the divisive individualism that so permeates our culture. Yet what profound witness we give when we live into our understanding that we call one another into being and that to live truly into the image of God we must do this as community.

It is in community that we see flashes of the Triune God—unified in diversity, sewn together by love. Take a minute. Look around this community, this congregation, this part of the Body of Christ we call Trinity. How are we reflecting the Triune God? How are we living into our essence as made in the image of God?

What sets us as Anglicans apart? Not that we differ—that’s part of being human—but that we find ways to be together in our differences. What marks us as bearing the image of God? Not our uniformity—we are hardly that—but our unity, our deep understanding that “I am because we are.”

My friends, our identity as Anglicans, our identity as people made in the image of the Triune God, is at risk. Our communion is experiencing deep divisions. Some have already broken away. Some are standing on the sidelines biding their time. But that is not God’s way.

We are called, you and I, to acknowledge and embrace our differences and yet to be one community, to “hold on to one another” even in the face of deep division. When we do, when we hold tight and wrestle on, we are living into our identity as children of God. What powerful testimony we give when we stay in communion with those with whom we deeply disagree, when we join at the table with polar opposites, when we deliberately create diverse communities.

Almost one hundred years ago a group of Sonomans came together to form a congregation. They approached their bishop; he appointed a priest to serve them; they began holding services and eventually built a church. I've often wondered why they took the name Trinity. I first suspected that it was because they held their first Sunday service on Trinity Sunday, but that was not the case. Their first service was sometime in Epiphany or maybe Lent. Then I thought that perhaps their mother church was called Trinity. But that was not the case either. Their mother church was Ascension, Vallejo. I now find myself believing that our forbearers had a deep understanding of the Triune God—God whose image of Being in relationship is the image in which we are made and that's why they named us Trinity--"Love Originating, Love Responding, Love Uniting." Let us live into and lead from our name. Amen.