

KGL+
Sermon
Trinity Church Boston
Trinity Sunday, Year A
June 4, 2023

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be always acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and redeemer. Amen.

This morning/ evening, I'd like to talk a bit about dioramas.

If you are from a certain generation of diorama-makers, you might immediately recall the smell of rubber cement, heavy, squeaky scissors, and perhaps a quiet handshake agreement with the manager of the local shoe store, ensuring that every time you were assigned a school project, your parents would not be forced into purchasing a new pair of shoes only to obtain the box for your high end presentation on Charlotte's Web.

The successor, it seems to dioramas, was the decorated poster board. If you were high achieving as a child, your parents may have invested in the tri-fold foam board, even (mine never had to). I think that this present generation might understand this best as a slide deck or PowerPoint, and I simultaneously lament, and am also envious of, the lack of rubber cement residue clinging to your hands for days on end.

On their own, dioramas and poster boards are wonderful ways of sharing information.

The thing was, such an assignment was rarely a solo endeavor, at least as I was growing up. When we manufactured such ostentations, it was most often assigned as a group project, that hallmark of the end of year assessments.

When a group project was assigned, I remember considering the following almost immediately:

- a) If three people are assigned to a group, the assumption is that basically the workload is only 1/3 of the project, rather than the whole responsibility.
- b) If three people are assigned to a group, by the end of the year you should have observed how your teacher splits people up, and you should know by now how to navigate yourself into the group of your friends by moving as far away from them as you can, thereby tricking said teacher into putting you together.
- c) If three people are assigned to a group, by the end of the year you should have observed who the smartest kid in the class is, and try to navigate into their group; the corollary to that is to navigate yourself to the group with the kid who has the extensive array of arts and crafts materials at home and a slightly overfunctioning parent. This is a game time decision, and called for extensive playdate reconnaissance.

For what it's worth, I'm positive we act nearly the same way as adults in our various personal and professional settings.

And you all know from experience that some of those immediate responses do not serve us, or the reality of group projects, well. Because:

A group project is never 1/3 of the work in a group of three. It is 300% more work.

A group project almost always erupts in disarray over whether to use puffy paint on the posterboard, or markers, or whether to pass along the project to each person to add their part, or to convene as a group to do it all together, or if the sparkle fade transitions and clip art match on each individual slide.

A group project starts with the premise that all three people can agree in the first place about what the project is actually about, or how to go about doing it.

It is a dearly held tradition in many churches to observe Trinity Sunday by ‘allowing’ a graduating high schooler to preach, or here in New England to herald the burgeoning good weather by shortening the liturgy and having a picnic instead, rather than digging into strange and complicated theology which, we affirm too repeatedly and too enthusiastically, doesn’t mean that we are polytheists—believing in many gods—but rather very sophisticated and special monotheists who hold an elevated understanding of how three in one and one in three works.

Just don’t ask us to explain it all.

The mystery of the Trinity isn’t a small issue however—in the burgeoning church, plenty of groups and sects split over the very concept of how this three in one thing worked. Lives were lost over it, wars waged, and churches burned or sacked over whether you had three candles on either side of your altar, or one. Even now, the Christian Church gets hung up over which person of the Trinity is ‘ours’, like a theological Bachelorette- some are Team Holy Spirit, some Team Jesus, some Team God, and we come out swinging as though we’ll find out when we come to the Holy One face to face beyond the veil that the mystery of the Trinity is actually that some of us have been rooting for the wrong rose-holder this entire time.

Jesus himself doesn’t explain this all in scripture. He only alludes to the very notion that there is more than simply a single entity to consider. In the Gospel of John which we heard a few weeks ago, he says “[the Father] will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”¹ In Luke’s Gospel and follow up Book of Acts, we have the Spirit literally descending on and among the people on the Day of Pentecost. And here in Matthew, who has been strangely silent on this point throughout his Gospel, Jesus’ resurrected-self instructs his disciples to not only go to the ends of the nations, but to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Our lectionary readings usually are chosen in order to support one another, so if you were reading or listening carefully to the Genesis passage, there is even a hint—which theologians love to pounce on—that in Creation the Trinity was present. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” Wind in Hebrew is ‘ruach,

¹ John 14:16, Year A, Easter 6

which also lends itself to the Greek equivalent, ‘pneuma’—wind can be breath can be spirit, and sometimes is each and all three at the same time.

There is also one more Easter Egg (a hidden fun nugget) in the Genesis reading which could be said points to a Trinitarian mode—did you hear it? “Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” If you want to distract a biblical scholar, as them to debate the meaning of that particular line, and how it has been understood by both Christians and Jews for the past two centuries.

I cannot say how or why the Trinity works, dear friends. I, personally, was really hoping for a picnic today.

But I do know that there is something deeply delightful about considering that our God is a God who is perpetually in relationship in order to create, redeem and sustain. A God who has to negotiate the conversation over puffy paint versus colored markers. A God who is jostling with the other two sets of eager hands gluing images into the smallest shoe box diorama of our lives ever.

A God who knows only how to rule as a unilateral authority is to take the easy way out, in a sense. A one-person project is unbelievably easier to create because it needs only to reflect one singular vision of the Creator. A God in relationship, however—is a God who understands—or who learns along the way—that not every one of their ideas will be used by the group; they will have to give up some of their power to allow others to have their visions made incarnate; that somewhere along the line, negotiations among a group can lead to deep creativity and prolific trust when done in love.

And this congregation—WE, are the heirs to this kind of relationship, people of Trinity Church.

On this, our feast day, we could spend this time unpacking the historical nature of the perichoretic relationship of the divine three in one and one in three, settling ourselves into an intellectual foray.

Or we could do a big group project together.

Or both, hey, you can discuss the nature of the Trinity over scooping beans and rice today. I’m for it.

Is anyone here a teacher? Then you know the secret of all group projects, right?

The visual outcome of the project is often secondary to the primary intent of those assignments—which is for us to discover just how to collaborate with one another in and through the mess of other humans.

The puffy paint vs. glitter glue negotiations are important in that how we honor one another, how we allow ourselves to prioritize relationship over our production, and even relationship over our productivity, is an inkling of our heritage as Trinitarian Christians. Our hope for salvation is not

in the poster board or diorama that we create. Our hope is in the way we create it together, all 300% more effort that it will take.

The Church—not just *this* church, but *THE* Church, the body of Christ gathered together, is the strangest, most wonderful, most challenging group project we could choose to join. Bring your poster paints, and your passion, and your shoe boxes and glue sticks, knowing that others are bringing their different materials as well, and that as long as we make it together, as a group, whatever we create will be a thing of perfectly imperfect beauty to our triune God.

Amen.