

Trinity Church in the City of Boston
The Rev. Morgan S. Allen
February 9, 2025
I Corinthians 15:1-11; V Epiphany (Year C)

In you, O Lord, have we taken refuge; for the sake of your name, lead us and guide us.¹ *Amen.*

More than one cinema auteur has observed filmmaking's love-story limits: a director can invest an hour of two people falling *in* love ... and dedicate at least that length of 35mm celluloid for their falling *out* of love ... but their *being* in love? Audiences tolerate no more than a minutes-long montage.²

I think of Sydney Pollack's heavy-handed *The Way We Were*. Forever handsome Robert Redford and impassioned Barbara Streisand squabble their flirtations on the college quad and at the curb of her brownstone during the rising action ["What kind of pie?"³], and then comes the steady, aching erosion leading to their divorce. Their marriage lasts only a little longer than the time it takes the pair to row across that Central Park pond.⁴

Or, more recently, Richard Linklater's trilogy of *Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset*, and *Before Midnight*: its dialogue-drenched, cross-continent narrative foregoes the *being-in-love* altogether!⁵ Instead, Julie Delpy's [enchanting] Celine and Ethan Hawke's [undeserving] Jesse prefer indulging the seductions of what-might-be and what-could-have-been, instead of risking those fancies by a deepened commitment to one another.

When congregations chart and tell the story of themselves, we have a similar tendency.

Surely, we at Trinity Church can appreciate the power of "misty, water-colored memories," the idealized "Way We Were" we romance of our storied past.⁶ Likewise, we can relate to unicorn-and-rainbow futures that look past the grace of *what-is* with little account for who we are in this place, at this time. And when telling our parish story, we blush at the idea of announcing the vitality of our common life these days; sharing that Good News seems somehow impolite, maybe even a jinx!⁷

In today's epistle from First Corinthians, Paul *proclaims* "the Good News" of Jesus' Resurrection, and I am digging on the language of "proclamation." A simple etymology from *pro*, or to set forth, as in *prologue*; and *clamare*, or to shout, as in *clamor*. When we *pro-claim*, we realize a share in what we declare – we do not imagine the "clamor" entirely accomplished, yet the act of proclamation moves us *toward* its accomplishment

The kids these days, they call this "manifesting." By our baptismal vows, for example, we *manifest* our faith's ethics. We do not recite those promises as tasks we have completed, but as

aspirations we inaugurate and endeavor – a covenanted future we continually call into being as we labor more practically to achieve it.

And what is the Resurrection that Paul *pro-claims*? Well, just beyond the fenceline of today's appointment, Paul explains in verse 20: "Christ has been raised from the dead [as] the first fruits of [all] who have died." The "first fruits," that devotion of offering *a portion* to make holy *the entire harvest*. By the Resurrection of Christ – that sacred portion – you and I and all people are being raised to new life ... *even right now!*

And Paul further clarifies that this Resurrection means more than only a night of the living dead, limited and literal resuscitation. Beginning with verse 35 and continuing with verse 42: "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Fool! ... What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.'" In other words, Resurrection means more than emptying the coffins sown in the earth; Resurrection means the transformation of our "perishable" world into an "imperishable" realm, a cosmos ordered in the Divine energy that created us and everything: *Love*.

We Trinitarians have gathered this Program Year around the theme, "Held In Common." We have *pro-claimed* that God bears us and all people in Love, and we have labored practically to realize that profession. Drawn from the Acts of the Apostles,⁸ we have committed ourselves to live lovingly within these walls no matter the disagreements and devastations that harangue us beyond them. We have celebrated instruments of our unity: Holy Eucharist and the *common* cup; the ecclesial bonds of our Episcopal Church, including those we shared last May, when we hosted our diocese's electing convention, and again in October, when we hosted the ordination of our new Bishop; and, more recently, as we explored *The Book of Common Prayer* in a teeming Forum series this Epiphany.

This theme has also acknowledged the complications and conflicts that *do* surround our loving life. Close at hand for us are the contradictions of nearby Boston *Common*, and this fall we marked with Trinity Boston Connects the 50th anniversary of Boston's busing crisis. Later, we sought to find our footing before and after the consequential national elections in November, sharing meaningful and moving worship and formation.

Braving in this way the demanding questions of our existence [see, that's what we've being doing]; and sharing so many moments of grace and beauty [and that's what we've done!];

Trinity Church continues to grow despite generationally stiff headwinds.⁹

This simple chart¹⁰ presents the Average Sunday Attendance or "ASA" for our meat-and-potatoes Sundays [that's "M&P," Team]. This count purposefully excludes the highs of Easter and Advent-Christmas that *overstate* weekly participation (for example, Candlelight Carols or Christmas Eve and Day when those holidays land on a weekend). This count also excludes the lower summertime counts – especially during this long season of Copley Square's construction – that *understate* our Sunday-by-Sunday engagement.

From my seat, excluding the seasonal peaks and valleys eliminates some noise from the signal – and the signal sounds a remarkably steady song of growing in these advances of 8% toward our pre-pandemic numbers, with the uplifting exception of a 10% movement when we first added back the 8AM service. As further testimony to this Good News, Christmas Eve attendance in 2024 increased **42%** from 2023.¹¹ I mean, dadgum, yall: that’s a lot!

To continue the growth of these last years, we must now accompany the *widening* of our congregation, with a *deepening* of the same [and Jesus does tell us that’s where the good fishing is¹²]. Trinity Church, we must dare the commitment of *being-in-love* with one another and our God! What might *that* look like?

In Galatians, Paul gives voice to the practical implications of Resurrection in what was likely an ancient baptismal proclamation¹³: “In Christ Jesus [we] are all children of God through faith ... [And] There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁴

Indeed, “if [we] belong to Christ” – if we choose that union before and above all divisions – then we become “heirs” of God’s “promise.” We dismantle *perishable* hierarchies by prioritizing our identity in Christ before race or geography; class or gender; orientation, age, or any other division.¹⁵ God dreams of a world ordered by *imperishable* Love, and Christ’s Resurrection *pro-claims* Love’s triumph: God did not and will not fulfill the Divine hope for us; yet the very act of creation inaugurates – *pro-claims* – that fulfillment ... and calls us to aspire and accomplish God’s dream finally and for eternity.

How humanity aches for this Resurrection realm and our *being-in-love*! Especially in this season when so many elected officials and corporate leaders act only for their own good, we who are united in Christ instead labor for the *common* good ... *we who are united in Christ instead labor for the common good*.¹⁶ Hear me: this means setting the needs of the *whole* community before our own preferences, conveniences, and enrichments.

Think of our *being-in-love* as a “first fruit” devotion: by our actions – no matter how seemingly small or grand – we *pro-claim* Christ’s Resurrection, we advance God’s realm! Every gladness we brave, every joy we share, every generosity we offer “manifests” the holy-making of the whole cosmos – just as surely as selfishness or cruelty or divisiveness would strengthen the *perishable*’s grip on us.

Being-in-love at Trinity means deepening our commitment to one another and to this parish.

Being-in-love means committing to greater constancy in worship, because your presence and prayers strengthen the whole Body of the Church and our witness to our neighbors. Even at 5PM on a Saturday – Lord, have mercy! – we are better when you are here.

Being-in-love means committing to greater generosity in Stewardship, because with our gifts and pledges we refuse perishable definitions of wealth and class, we set ourselves in God's economy, and we empower more ministry in this parish, in our diocese, and in all The Episcopal Church.

Being-in-love means devoting ourselves to more – and more meaningful – service, because we have gifts of time and talent that can benefit our neighbors – not to make ourselves feel better, but to make the world more whole.

To celebrate these glad days, I again point you to the “Living In Love” link,¹⁷ and I urge you to share your images of this vibrant, love-filled community. In turn, we will widely share that Good News through social media, on our new website [and check that out if you haven't already], and in our February Worship Booklets.

Finally, with our *pro-claiming* in right order – that is, appreciating *The Way We Were* and our remarkable history serves our *being-in-love* in the present and not the other way around – we look forward to celebrating the 150th anniversary of this building's consecration exactly two years from tomorrow: February 9, 2027!¹⁸ What an incredible inheritance we have received, and what an important responsibility attends that gift. As we have been blessed, we will continue to labor lovingly to be a blessing.

Toward those good ends, your parish leadership will recruit our 150th Anniversary Committee this spring, readying for an announcement of its membership on the sesquicentennial of “The Laying of the Cornerstone” of the Church and Parish Hall on May 20. This cohort of parishioners and staff will aim us for priorities and programming that ensure we hit that anniversary date in full and swift stride.

As we *pro-claim* that anniversary, this fall we plan to reach out to all those who love Trinity Church with the Good News of this vital, growing congregation. In that outreach, we look forward to deepening our connections with God and with one another, as well as building bridges for those who have been away to return: *Yall come back now*¹⁹. See, we want everyone to share in our *being-in-love*, to hold in common our commitment to the common good ... for in the mystery of the Holy Spirit's movement, by our gracious and loving labor for our neighbor's well-being and joy, *we find our own well-being and joy*, and – indeed – we *pro-claim* God's resurrection of the world.

Held in Common by these hopes,
Amen.

¹ From Psalm 31.

² For whatever reason certain moments stick in one’s brain (*my* brain), yet on the regular I can’t remember day-old details that would prove a lot more useful, I recall my undergraduate film professor’s mention of a celebrated director describing this dynamic. Inconveniently, I could not remember which director or exactly what they said, but I associated the idea with *The Way We Were* and the length of time it took Katie and Hubbell to paddle across that little pond (in Central Park?) as the expanse of their “being-in-love.” A search of The Googles did not prove definitive, suggesting Jean-Luc Goddard, Woody Allen, or Sydney Pollack might have said something similar. I want to say it was Pollack, but I left the idea generic, because I couldn’t find a specific attribution.

³ [“You have to stay for supper – that’s all there is to it!” Streisand lands the punch of every line, even with all those groceries in her arms.](#)

⁴ Prompted by preparations for this sermon, my wife, daughter, and I watched *The Way We Were* last weekend. Gracious, it’s a mess: gaping holes in the basic narrative, undeveloped ideas around every corner, ambivalence about what years (and what point) Pollack and Screenwriter Arthur Laurents wanted to make. And who is buying that Redford looked like he was in college! Even so, it has moments that land with *so much* force: “No one will expect more of you than I do,” Katie pleads to Hubbell. “I know,” he replies with grief and gratitude and giving-up.

For all its failings, we can feel the tragedy of Streisand’s and Redford’s unwillingness to build a life together based on the combustion of their partnership. Despite their admiration for one another’s related graces, each imagined a future bending the other to their own needs and hopes. 2.75/4 Stars.

⁵ I have lots of thoughts and feelings about the *Before* trilogy – and I will keep them in my pocket for a future sermon or lecture. Between now and then I will note that some 25 years ago my brother-in-law rented from Richard Linklater a house next to the Days Inn on I-35 and 35th-ish. Fortunately for the welfare of its rodent population, it’s since been demolished.

⁶ During the Annual Parish Meeting, I punctuated the rhythm of these lines with images on the big screen – check out the slide deck to get the fuller sense (and to see that unicorn leaping over Trinity Church on a rainbow!).

⁷ And we recognize that greater investment in *who-we-are* risks losing those reality-buffering memories and daydreams we have carried so adoringly. It’s harder than it looks.

⁸ Acts 2:44 and 4:32.

⁹ A sage bishop once challenged me: “Morgan, numbers are not the only thing that matters, but they are important: the Lord did not call us to take five talents and turn them into two.” I say, *Amen*.

¹⁰ 2021-’22 Program Year ASA: **370** (57% of ‘19)
2022-’23 Program Year ASA: **423** (65% of ‘19)
2023-’24 Program Year ASA: **483** (75% of ‘19)
2024-’25 Program Year ASA: **537** (83% of ‘19)

¹¹ ’23 Christmas Eve Attendance: **2,155**; ’24 Christmas Eve Attendance: **3,055**.

¹² Luke 5:4, from today’s Gospel appointment.

¹³ Also Colossians 3:11, Romans 10:12, 1 Corinthians 12:13, among others.

¹⁴ Galatians 3:28.

¹⁵ A demanding and complicated commission that merits more exploration than a single sermon will allow. Join the Lenten Forum on March 9 for more about Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and the righteous hope of this claim.

¹⁶ Ibid. I believe ideas of the “common good” have traction in these days of our national life.

¹⁷ trinitychurchboston.org

¹⁸ ... this would have enjoyed a little more oomph had we met on Sunday [the day-of anniversary], as customary!

¹⁹ Yes, a *Beverly Hillbillies* allusion I should have resisted.