

WGUMC June 7, 2015 "Transcripts of the Trinity"
2 Corinthians 13:5-13

You've heard the old proverb: bad things come in three's. But there are some good things that come in three's, too. Let's see: Bacon, Lettuce and Tomato; Peter, Paul & Mary; Huey, Dewey and Louie; Hank thought of: wine, women and song. We also have the Three Musketeers, the Three Stooges, the Three Tenors, and Three Kings. And don't forget: our Three-in-One God.

OK, technically last Sunday was Trinity Sunday, but I didn't get to preach so we're going to celebrate it today. But instead of trying to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, I'm going to suggest that we experience it, and we don't even need mind-altering drugs to do it. We can experience the three-in-oneness of God on this plane of reality, as long as we are members of a community.

You see Christians believe in one God, traditionally known to us in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So within

God's very self, there is already community. Now if we have God as Trinity and the Trinity is a community, what does that say about humanity? It says that if we are truly made in the image of God, then we can't be truly human without community.

This becomes painfully clear to us around puberty. My family moved when I was in the 7th grade from Iowa to Montana. We lived in a snooty subdivision and I was lonely. Fortunately, I had my horse for company. But that wasn't enough to keep me from feeling like a nobody. So I joined a 4-H club and took on a new identity as a member of the horsey community.

But my search for community didn't end there. In fact, it got harder as I got older. As adults, we don't have time for clubs and organizations anymore. That's why so many of us go on the Internet in search of a virtual community. But no matter how many friends or followers you have, it can still be mighty

lonely.

Of course there are churches on the Internet these days. Some even welcome you to take communion with them online. All you have to do is buy some wine and bread and log on. But how can we experience the Real Presence of Christ when we are not in the real presence of our sisters and brothers in Christ?

John Wesley was no technophobe. He used social media. In fact, he relied as much on the printing press as he did on his pony to spread the Good News across Great Britain. But reading his penny pamphlets wasn't enough to make you a Christian. He said, Christianity is essentially a social religion. Make it a solitary religion and you'll kill it. That's because we can't learn how to go on to perfection in love without having other people around to practice loving. We can't learn to persevere in our faith without having others to teach it and to test it. We can't learn to forgive without having others who

forgive us and who need our forgiveness. [See his *Sermon on the Mount IV*] Christianity is a social religion. You need a community to practice it.

One community that needed a lot of practice in being Christian is the church in Corinth. There are all kinds of problems and power struggles plaguing that church. So Paul's second letter to them ends with a word of warning: "examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith...Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?"

Evidently, Paul has his doubts. He wants to give them time to get their act together before he comes for a visit. Because when he arrives, he wants to spend his time building them up, not tearing them down. So, he tells them: "Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."

All along Paul has been trying to teach them how to be church, and his whole letter says, "Listen to me." But here at

the end of it, he says, "Look at the Trinity." Here he points away from their problems to God's promises. In one of the very few allusions to the Trinity we find in the Bible, Paul says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." In other words, no matter how confused or conflicted they are, the believers in Corinth are still made in the image of the Trinity and, by the grace of God, they can live and love in community.

As Charles Wesley so poetically put it, we are "ordained [by God] to be Transcripts of the Trinity," and church is where we experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit. If it can happen in Corinth, it can happen anywhere.

In fact, it happened here. Last Sunday, when the bell choir and praise band and chancel choir and children's choir all got together and started singing "*Dona Nobis Pacem*," I had an experience of the Trinity. I looked around and saw all those

faces, different groups, different ages, playing and singing different parts of the same song for peace. And I said to myself: "This is it. This is God's community." Since, every group had practiced on their own and only went through the song together once, there can be only one explanation for how it came off so beautifully. O blessed Trinity!

The truth is that we can experience the Trinity even when things get pretty messy. One morning a few weeks ago, I was texting Susan and Lisa from the hospital as I awaited surgery. They were at the courthouse awaiting Russ's sentencing. But they were not alone. A big group of Willow Glen folk showed up. They came for our brother Russ, not because he was innocent—we don't know that—and not because we have no regard for the crime—it was serious. They came because that's where Jesus would have been, that's what Jesus would have done. They came to that courtroom to bring the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the

Holy Spirit into a very dark place. And in doing so, they proved to me that they are transcripts of the Trinity. They brought the father love of God to a prodigal son. They brought the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to a soul in need of salvation. They brought the communion of the Holy Spirit to someone who is going to spend at least the next ten years of his life in severe social deprivation.

None of us probably thought that being a member of church meant practicing love in a prison. But when you join a church, you make a commitment to love others, no matter what. You say, "I'm throwing my lot in with these folks, not because they're all model Christians, but because they are going to give me many, many opportunities to practice my faith, and whether they are saints or sinners, they are going to help me go on to perfection in love."

Unlike most of you, Methodist ministers don't get to choose their churches. The Bishop calls and says, "Go to and

learn to love those folks, whoever they are, however they are."

But I no longer envy you lay people, who can go to church anywhere you want. No, I've learned that going to a church where there are no problems and no power struggles, where no one challenges me or offends me—if I could find such a church—would not bring me any closer to God than when I started out. I feel kind of sorry for the folks who don't have much patience with people or who tend to get hurt easily and leave a church at the first opportunity. I wonder if they ever progress in their faith journey.

Remember what Paul says: "suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." [Romans 5:3-5] Being a member of a church can bring on some suffering. Think of it as an invitation to grow in grace!

For you were ordained to be a transcript of the Trinity, so it's a good thing that you have a community where you can experience it. Here is where the love of God comes to life in liturgy and song, Scriptures and gestures. Here is where the grace of Christ is real every time we break bread together, bless prayer shawls for each other, bear one another's burdens, and forgive one another's offenses. Here is where the Holy Spirit creates communion around tables for potlucks on the patio or for the homeless in the park or for the Lord's Supper in our sanctuary. Here around this table is the place to experience God's trinity of grace. Let us pray.