

Homily notes, Trinity Sunday
Trinity Church, Swarthmore
June 7, 2020
The Rev. Dr. Edward E. Thompson

[These notes are a close representation but not verbatim record of what was preached on June 7, 2020. -EET]

Today is Trinity Sunday, the day we are called especially to focus on the importance of the understanding of God as Three-in-One, One-in-Three.

There are many ways to speak to this reality, which is mystery, and there are many names for it: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Mother, Child, and Loving Truth; Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer; The One who always has been, is now, and ever shall be.

There is also much to ponder about the Trinity, but this year, I am struck by how different we imagined this day would be when several months ago, we were planning the culminating weeks of our 125th Anniversary Year. When we began to plan Trinity Sunday many months ago as the final Sunday of celebrating our parish's 125th, we imagined such a joyful day. We would have just celebrated Pentecost the prior Sunday morning, followed by our 125th Anniversary Gala that evening. On Trinity Sunday, we'd planned for the young persons participating in Rite 13 to share their interpretations of the scripture and walk that rite of passage from their families into the larger church community. And the music we would have shared!

Instead, we are each of us in our homes. We can hear the Scriptures, but we are unable truly to sing together. We are unable to share a handshake or hug across the aisle. We are unable to gather round the Lord's Table together in celebration and enjoy fellowship in person. And we've grown accustomed to this living with less.

I say all this today not to disparage what we can do, which I still value and want to have with you, but because I want all of us to understand and truly feel, in relation to all that has gone on in this country since George Floyd was murdered, what it means to live with *less than what should be*.

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Words, certainly my words today, cannot express all that needs to be said about the past two weeks, let alone about the sin and tragedy of racism. All the words in the world cannot express the sighs and groanings too deep for words. But I've listened to many people in the past two weeks, and I can tell you there is rage. There is lament. There are tears. There are also prayers that have yet to be voiced, tears that will not come. It's as if some are in a kind of existential shock, in which the initial response has not yet given way to what must come. Then there are those who seem, still, walled off and unaware. Perhaps Covid has contributed to that, but we have admit also that one marker of privilege is the freedom to choose whether to feel personally affected by the oppression of others. So let me add from what I have been told.

For some in the black community, every killing of a black person is felt in their own bodies. It is a personal assault. Black families all across America are again giving their teenage children, particularly boys, "the talk," about how they must act in American society to be safe. "Honey, I can't protect you out there. This is what you must do to survive. But Mom, it's not fair. Yes, my love. I know." I think this collective trauma for black America is related also to how we are all created as human beings. Because we are not just individual but social beings, we can feel trauma to another in ourselves.

The suffering and pain, the insult to their individual and collective humanity that people of color, especially African-Americans, have known throughout their lives, is at least now more palpable to the rest of us. Perhaps the rest of us have more empathy for it now, and that is good. Perhaps the rest of us can stand in better solidarity with them now, and that is better. But best of all is to come to the realization that we are meant to be one human family.

Yesterday, I went to the Vigil for Lives Taken and Lost in front of the County Courthouse steps in Media. I have to say I was expecting something different. We'd been asked to bring a candle. I'd seen a picture of a vigil in the news. I thought we'd be standing, kneeling, hearing names, praying in silence.

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Instead, when I arrived just as it began, there were already hundreds of people gathered. Young, old, and everything in between, children and white-haired ladies, and every color of the human family. Sponsored by the Media chapter of the NAACP and Media Fellowship House, it was beautifully organized. The Mayor of Media spoke. Mary Gay Scanlon spoke. Many area pastors were there. Rabbi Jeremy Gerber gave the opening prayer. Fr. Ernie Galaz, the rector Christ Church, Media, gave a most moving prayer, invoking St. Theresa of Avila's meditation on being the body of Christ in the world:

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good."

We heard the words of the prophet Amos, a voice which has resounded through the centuries:

"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." [Amos 5:24]

People came to the podium in pairs, light and dark-skinned, from their church or community organization. White pastors spoke in solidarity with people of color, denouncing white supremacy, pledging to be part of the work of justice.

One of the last speakers touched me the most. I need to learn her name (there were so many). She began, "We are our neighbor's people." Do you catch the reference? God said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother? And Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" [paraphrased, see Gen 4:9]

Yes, we are. She spoke of living in our different skins, acknowledging that we share our humanity. As Shylock the Jew says to the Christians in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, "If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

Not one of those speakers could have had the impact of all of them. It was all of them together. It was all of us gathered, speakers and listeners. More than one of

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those at the microphone spoke of the inspiration they felt, looking out at the crowds and seeing such diversity, the rainbow of colors of the human family, all there because black lives, because all lives, matter. It was a sign of hope, a glimpse of the new Jerusalem, one of the speakers said.

But I do not want to move too easily to hope, to slide into it in such way that we are sliding past or over the manifold tragedy which racism is for all of us. Earlier I said that privilege is marked by the possibility to feel unaffected by oppression others cannot ignore. Those words were chosen carefully: I said “to feel unaffected”; I did not say, “to be unaffected,” because, my beloved in Christ, we are all affected by the sin of racism. We are all in the midst of a society which is so much less than what God intends for us. And I want us all to feel that. None of us can be completely all right when some of us are wondering if they or their son or daughter will be pulled over for a minor traffic infringement this evening and wind up dead.

So, if you feel quite comfortable with the way things are in this society, I am asking you to allow yourself to get a little uncomfortable....to get comfortable with feeling the discomfort of what others have been living with for whole lifetimes. We should not be comfortable with the way things are. But if you, whatever the color of the skin in which you live, are among those who already feel overwhelmed, grief-stricken, unable even to cry or prayer, I want you to know that you are not alone. I hear you. Others hear you. And there are signs, at least glimmers, of a new day.

The mystery of the Trinity allows us to see relationship in its highest order, relationship at the center of the nature of God. At various times in our lives, we may well be more drawn to one of the three Persons of the Trinity. There may be a time when God the Father/Mother figure has the most for you in your spiritual mind’s eye. Or Jesus, your friend, your guide, your leader, your confessor. Or the Holy Spirit as Counselor and Comforter, the One who calls you into your unique ministry. These are not three separate Persons, mind you. They are as three distinct but interwoven entities or faces, three dancers in the one dance which is God.

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Today, this Trinity Sunday, I hope and pray that we find renewed relationship not only with our Triune God, but with one another across all the differences which skin color, country of origin, sexuality, sexual orientation and political persuasion engender in us. We are schooled by much of life to differentiate ourselves, one from another, us vs. them. But the Triune God, Three in One and One in Three, calls us to see the essential oneness in which we live and move and have our being – each one of us, all of us and every created thing. As the Three Persons remind us, this is not an erasure of particularity, but a celebration of the uniqueness of individuality, without which we would be trying to dance alone.

But we are meant to dance together, and the Triune God shows us how.