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John 3:1-17
Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalm 29
Romans 8:12-17

May 27, 2018
Trinity Sunday

Today is Trinity Sunday. I know...it's the day you have all been waiting for on the church calendar. The day we get to dig in to the doctrine of the Trinity. The day all of your questions will be answered. The day it will start to make sense – this concept of the God, the 3 in the one. The day you will walk away from church understanding every aspect of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. Right?

Well, if that is what you were hoping for, we might as well go home now. I can't give you those kinds of answers – at least not in a 10-minute sermon. As much as we say those words every week, "In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," understanding their depth is an entirely different endeavor.

Now last week, we considered how God has given each of us spiritual gifts. We were charged with thinking about how individually we should use those gifts for the common good. This week we are going to take it a step further and consider how God has gifted our congregation to work for the common good. In other words, how do we utilize our individual gifts so that they can be applied to this thing we call church.

So, instead of trying to unpack the doctrine of the Trinity, let's consider this morning a practical application of the Trinity to help us understand it better. In order to do so, I want us to focus on what the Trinity has to say to us as a congregation, the church, God's way of grouping us together to worship, praise, and serve.

What kind of example does the Trinity set for us?

Let me start us off by making a few observations. The first is that we don't go to church like we used to. I remember growing up in the South when one of the first questions you asked someone when you met them was, "What church do you attend?" Truth be told, we were a little skeptical of anyone who didn't belong to our same denomination but there was a sigh of relief that at least they believed in Jesus! (Although we still looked a little sideways at the folks from the Presbyterian church.)

We rarely missed a Sunday and church always included Sunday School. In general, we got a few things right and few things wrong – we loved going to church but we could be a little closed minded when it came to difference. We liked when people confessed their faith but were skeptical if they had too many questions about the existence of God. We said we were welcoming but we liked to welcome those who looked a lot like us.

But, in spite of our faults, church was where we developed relationships. It was the hub of the community. We didn't go asking the church, "What are you going to do for me today?" Instead, we went asking what we could do for God. It was so ingrained in our cultural makeup. We would not have defined ourselves in any way other than a devout church-goer.

But, somehow, over the years, those sentiments have shifted. Our desire to be in the pews each week has declined. We are busy, over-committed, and inundated with demands to the point that simply showing up on Sunday morning or giving back to the church is too often just one more thing to add on to an otherwise packed calendar.

So what has really changed? I have a suspicion that our calendars aren't the problem. But, that maybe our desire to be in deep relationship with another is at the root of the shift. We are more private than we used to be, we don't know our neighbors the way our grandparents did. If you are like me – your first assumption is that no one has the time to get to know you and therefore, you default to short, unimportant conversations. But you never go too deep or too personal because we have been conditioned to believe that proper, polite community doesn't share too much. And you know it's true...think about when you ask someone how their day is going and what you really hope is that they will answer "fine" and just keep walking. All the while you are crossing your fingers that they won't stop and really tell you how they are.

I have watched this trend grow and grow. It's the trend of a hyper-individualism. To be clear – I don't think that this means those of us who fall into this category aren't religious. We can be very religious. But, what I do think it means is that we have forgotten the importance of relationships – the living into community alongside one another – in good and bad times. In our similarities and in our difference. That we can't go it alone and God never intended for us to be private worshippers.

Maybe you are wondering...what does the Trinity have to do with all of that. Fair question. At its most basic definition...at its heart, the Trinity is about relationship. God's relationship with us and our relationship with one another. In fact, the Trinity can't exist without a loving commitment to all three aspects. They have to work together, for a common goal. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. You might say the Trinity is about foundation building, defining the needed parts to make the whole function. And, when it comes to relationships, you can't work independently. You have to figure out one another's strengths and gifts and use those to create a well-functioning unit. It's team building 101.

For me, the Trinity team building model plays out like this... I think of God the Father as the strategic planner. The one with the grand vision, who sees the big picture. I think of God the Holy Spirit as the social organizer. The hostess with the mostess, making sure everyone is included. And, I think of God the Son as the doer. The role up your sleeves guy who is making sure everyone is taken care of. The strategic planner, the social organizer, the doer. That's our team.

Each aspect of the Trinity with an individual gift that would never be fully effective on its own. This is God's design and model for us. Think about it this way...

First, the church needs to think beyond its walls, to have a big picture of its community. It has to take time to listen to the needs of those around it and consider how it can be an integral part of supporting the well-being of individuals, families, businesses, and community groups. That's the strategic planning side – the God the Father. Who are we and what can we offer?

Second, the church also needs to reach beyond those card caring Christians. We have to do away with what we think church should look like and who should walk in these doors. We have to think more openly about the breadth of God's grace and remember that God so loved this world. This world – not a perfect, flawless version but the messy, broken, and stumbling version. God loves this world just as we are and we are called to do the same. That's the hostess with the mostess - the God the Holy Spirit. How can we welcome everyone in our midst?

Third, the church needs to get dirty. Jesus wasn't known for staying out of trouble. He wasn't known for hanging out with in crowd or trying to live up to a certain image. He was in the midst of the need. He went where others would not go. He loved and healed. He spoke up for those who didn't have a voice. He committed his life to serving others. That's the doer – the God the Son. How can I serve you?

Folks, we can look at doctrine all day long and never get to the heart of the Gospel message. We can become wise in biblical knowledge and understand the Trinity from a theological perspective but become down right naïve about the needs of the world and of our community.

Today, I want you to remember that beyond the doctrine, beyond the theology, beyond what we do and don't understand about the Trinity – the simple message is that it is all about relationship. Each of us coming together with our individual gifts to create a strong and vibrant community of faith, committed to loving and serving God and one another.

So maybe you are the strategic planner kind of person, ready to help think big and broad about who we can be as a congregation. Maybe you are the social organizer, ready to invite and welcome and encourage others to come and get involved. Maybe you are the doer, ready to roll up your sleeves and serve someone in need.

Above all, whatever your gifts, remember that we are called to be in relationship with one another – into a Trinitarian way of life. Whatever your gifts, we need you. This church needs you. God needs you. Let us build this church together.

And in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.