

Trinity Sunday C 2016 Sermon

Much of this sermon is taken from David Lose²

I had the privilege this past week of attending our Annual Diocesan Clergy Conference, where Richard Rohr was our guest speaker. Few people (outside my family) have had a greater impact on my life over the past 30 years than Richard Rohr. Being with him, you know you are in the presence of a holy man.

One of the things Richard told us this past week was that his next book, which he has just finished, is about the Trinity¹ – not the Trinity that theologians speculate about, but rather the Trinity as relationship between the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and us. The subtitle of the book is, “The Trinity and Your Transformation.” For as you have heard me say the past several years on Trinity Sunday, the Holy Trinity is about *relationship*: Father continually emptying himself into the Son, who fully receives the Father in love, and continually empties himself into the Holy Spirit, who fully receives the Son in love and continually empties herself into the Father – and on and on, without end. This is the foundational pattern of the universe: emptying in love, receiving in love; emptying in love, receiving in love, in one endless flow. And the doctrine of the Trinity says that you and I are created to be part of this flow – you and I, the Body of Christ, are, as Fr. Rohr says, the Fourth person of the Trinity. “Let **us** make humankind in **our** image, according to **our** likeness,” God states in the very first chapter of the Bible, using the first person plural. We were created in the image and likeness of a Trinitarian God whose very essence is relationship.

But so often, we don’t live out of that inner self that we were created to be – our true self, created to participate in the life-flow of the Holy Trinity. Rather, all too often we live out of a false self, our isolated ego self. Part of the reason we do this, Fr. Rohr says, is that you and I are fearful: we are afraid that if we empty ourselves, we will not be filled again. So we withdraw outside the emptying and receiving Life-Flow of the Trinity. We need to learn to trust, to have faith, that our outpouring will always be followed by infilling – though often in a different way than we expect. The Spirit blows where it wills.

Another part of our problem is that our ego self prefers separateness and superiority, and therefore shies away from entering the foundational spiritual flow of emptying in love and receiving in love, which is an egalitarian process without the competition and comparison which *define* the ego in our culture. The ego always contrasts itself over and against others, creating a dualism which is a totally *different* dynamic from the emptying/filling **cycle** of the Trinitarian relationship. In order to participate in the Life-Flow of the Trinity, we need to let go of the competitive and comparative ego, and in trust enter the egalitarian flow of Divine love which is the very essence of the Holy Trinity.

Lutheran Professor David Lose has a similar take on the Holy Trinity, though he uses some different images and metaphors. He writes: “The doctrine of the Trinity is, as we all know, about relationship. God is in relationship in the way **we** were *intended* to be in relationship and are *invited* to be in relationship even now. The relationship of the three members of the Trinity is not only a relationship of equals, three persons sharing themselves fully, but also a relationship of complete and free interdependence.” And if we reflect for a moment, a spirit of “*inter*dependence” contrasts starkly with the *in*dependent individualism which characterizes much of our society today.

Dr. Lose, who is the father of teenage children, insightfully contrasts relationships where there is a *pair* with relationships where a third is added. “Parents know this all too well,” he writes. “The third child isn’t just one more than two, it’s a whole new sibling equation. There’s something about the very presence of the third child that upsets the natural pairing of the first two. Two can play on a see-saw, the third demands a whole new game.

“Our world... is incredibly binary; it is composed of pairs, pairs that go together, define each other, and ultimately are defined by and over [against] each other [by comparison and competition]. Just about everything we know we learned in contrasting pairs: yes and no, up and down, hot and cold, [good and bad]. ... Later we learned who we are in the world in the same fashion, with the same binary and opposing contrasts attached: I am boy not girl, white not black, [Christian not Muslim], and so on.

“Binary is okay for *learning* contrasts, but as we can already see by the few examples we’ve chosen, each member of a binary pair defines itself *over and against* each other. Which introduces the element of **power**. Think, for a moment, of the temptation in [the Garden of] Eden -- to know the *difference* between good and evil. To be able to discriminate -- in both senses of the word -- is to wield power through definition and position. And so the **two** *grasp* for independence from God and stumble into a world where they only know who they *are* in relation to who they are not. In this light, Adam’s complaint that it was the fault of the woman, and Eve’s that it was the serpent, is the history of the world writ small.

“But the Trinity is not like that. The three members of the Trinity *do* not -- **cannot** -- define themselves over and against each other but [rather] in, with, and through each other. We do not define the Father as the One who is **not** the Son and who is **not** the Spirit (a typical set of binary power plays). Rather, we understand the Father *in* and *through* the Son **and** the Spirit [as Jesus has been repeating in the last several Sundays’ Gospel readings]. Or, even more radically, God the Father cannot be Father *apart from* Son and Spirit. It is Son and Spirit that give context for, make sense of, even make possible the Father. This mutual, free, and shared interdependence is a wholly different kind of relationship than

those that govern our world. [And we don't have to look very far to see the polarization and dualism of our world today.]

“The Trinity therefore not only holds out a possibility beyond our broken, binary relationships, but actually invites us **into** the sharing and interdependence of the God who is Three-in-One. In Baptism, we are invited to know who we are not in terms of what we *aren't*, but rather in terms of *how much we are loved*. We come to know *who* we are, that is, in terms of *whose* we are, the treasured [children] of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Nor is this a casual invitation. Indeed, if we are to believe the biblical drama and its witness to the depths to which God will go to draw us into the Trinitarian embrace, then we might suspect that just as each member of the Trinity is necessary to complete the other two, so also are *we* necessary to complete the Trinity.

“Seen this way, [our true Self, confirmed in our] baptism conveys a profound ‘worthiness’ beyond anything we might seek and beyond anything our binary world can confer.” (unquote)

Today we leave John's Gospel, from which we have been fed throughout the Easter season. But before returning to Luke's Gospel next Sunday, allow me to recall one more image from John, which I think relates directly to the Trinitarian flow of life. The scene is the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus asks her for a drink. (You see, he knows that **she** is part of the flow of divine life, and that *he* can drink from *her*!) Then Jesus tells the woman that if she just asked (if she would invite and be open to receive the Trinitarian flow), he would give her *living* water. “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty,” he tells her, assuring her that she will always be filled and therefore can risk emptying herself for the sake of others. “The water that I will give,” Jesus tells her, “will become in [you] a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (John 4:14) The water of the Spirit that Jesus gives us, pours into us, becomes a spring of water gushing up to eternal life and pouring out from us back into God and into all the **children** of God whom we meet. We need no longer fear that if we pour ourselves out we will not be filled again with the Divine flow of Spirit. “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty” – but will always be filled.

On this Trinity Sunday, may we turn from the dualistic, binary value system on which our culture is based, and return to our originally-intended life as a channel of the Trinitarian flow: the loving receiving and outpouring of the Holy Trinity, gushing up to eternal Life.

AMEN

¹ *Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*, available October, 2016

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=1540>