

Trinity Sunday
May 22, 2016
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Making Hope a Verb

In the name of the Holy One, the Holy Three, Amen.

I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in one, and One in Three. Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Amen.

These words adapted from a Gaelic prayer entitled St. Patrick's Breastplate are attributed to that patron saint who faced many dangers bringing Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century. This prayer invokes the power of the Trinity to be a protection and shield in times of trouble. A prayer of praise to the Triune God, Patrick was said to have recited its words in the midst of battle.

Does this Triune God also show up in the midst of our battles? In a world filled with anxiety and suffering the idea of God's protection, support, and empowerment is appealing. But I am not sure that we so easily rely on the strength of the Divine when the going gets tough. In our culture of self-determination it's easy to forget the power offered to us. Last week we celebrated Pentecost and the life giving energy of the Holy Spirit that dwells in our hearts. Today we recognize the fullness of the Trinity.

For centuries, theologians have attempted to define the mystery of the Trinity through doctrine. But rather than a set of beliefs, we experience the Trinity as a relationship. It begins with the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and expands to the relationship of the Triune God with all of creation. Trinity Sunday celebrates this encounter of the eternal with humankind, a dynamic connection of intimacy and unity. To be in relationship with God's abundant resources means that we can experience peace even in the midst of trouble. God's faithful presence allows us to call upon "the strong name of the Trinity," in whom we can find our greatest hope.

Paul spoke of this hope in his letter to the Romans. He wrote to encourage the struggling Christian community in Rome. Comprised of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, they were at odds with one another and with Roman leadership. Suffering under oppressive military control, there was increasing pressure to worship the emperor. Paul reminded Christians of the powerful gift they held in their hearts. "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But a life of faith also includes struggle. Paul was no stranger to troubles and born of his own suffering, he developed an eternal perspective. Paul taught that suffering would produce endurance, endurance would produce character and character would produce hope, a hope that would not disappoint. If only they could remember they did not walk alone. With faith in Christ, God's love was poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Now in my travels as a psychotherapist, it was also a common progression that suffering could produce frustration, frustration produce apathy and apathy produce despair. These are the times when relationship is crucial as the foundation of hope. The care from another human may be the love of God that person needed. Being faithful in a world of suffering is a challenge and that is

why community is so important. Even when we can't believe, God shows up as strength beyond our strength, wisdom beyond our wisdom, sometimes in the most unlikely people.

Parker Palmer in his book Let your Life Speak portrayed his own journey from despair to hope. Spending a number of years in a Quaker community his hope came through relationships with his brothers. In the depths of depression, he experienced love offered that neither invaded his suffering, nor avoided it. He described a love that represented to him, God's love, a God who does not fix us but gives us strength by suffering with us. Palmer suggests that by simply holding the space of another's solitude we may mediate the love of God to one who needs something deeper than any human can give. Sometimes our uprooted lives become the seedbeds of new growth. This is the hope of which Paul writes.

How do we know and experience God in relationship and how can we cultivate the connection that brings us hope? It begins by accepting that we can neither define nor contain the mystery of God. We may find connection as we develop more contemplative practice, intentionally taking time out from our frenetic lives to reflect, and listen for the way God is present. We may experience God by giving of ourselves to service, noticing God in the face of others. We manifest God's presence when we seek peace in communities of conflict and oppression. Practices of inclusion, welcome and acceptance make hope a verb to those who feel isolated or alone. The Triune God shows up through our creative, redeeming and sustaining actions.

Paul reminds us that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit. When we turn outward and extend God's love, we transform suffering—ours and that of others—into endurance, character and hope. Can we be a Trinitarian community that celebrates unity not uniformity? Will our faith and actions mirror that community of love that is the Trinity? We can if we bind ourselves in relationship to the strong name of the Trinity. God's love before us, beside us and within us does not promise a life without struggle, only that we never walk the journey alone. That is our protection and our source of hope. Thanks be to God, the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the three in one. Amen.