

June 4, 2023  
Trinity Sunday  
The Rev. Mark Pendleton  
Christ Church, Exeter

Part of me thinks I should give a blanket warning about today's sermon.

Over the years, I have been preached some pretty shaky and flat sermons on Trinity Sunday.

I was always pretty steady (I thought) during the Easter season – love Easter -- and Pentecost was upbeat with examples of the Spirit energizing and pushing and activating us.

My problem has been that I probably tried too hard to explain the Trinity. I should have been like St. Patrick, who legend tells us, picked up a three-leafed shamrock to explain the Trinity to the pagan Celts.

Case in point: I was prone to quote something like this:

“There is only one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or suffering; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity.”

Exciting stuff. Riveting. Edge of your pews. I know. Right?

I should have listened to author Anne Lamott (Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith)

“I didn't need to understand the hypostatic unity of the Trinity; I just needed to turn my life over to whoever came up with redwood trees.”

All along I would have been better off talking more about the idea of the Trinity than the doctrine.

Big things happen when someone says: “I have an idea!” And not just inventions that have changed how we live. “I have an idea...” can be one of the most outrageous statements one can make.

Let's go down to the beach before sunrise.

How about I call a friend I haven't spoken to in a long while.

Let's get a rescue dog at the shelter and give her a home – even though getting a dog makes no sense at this point.

I have an idea: let's have breakfast for dinner. Growing up I loved when we had pancakes for dinner when it was clear my mother ran out of options.

Idea: What if people started sharing more and consuming less? Fighting less and talking more?

Or: what if loving someone else is the surest way to love myself.

I'm OK with the chance that God began as an idea.

Someone, at some point, had to look up into the heavens, the immense blanket of stars, the sea and the mountains, all the animals and thought: A Presence. A force. An energy. A mystery at the heart of it all.

Israel and the Jewish people took the idea to heart and retold the stories and wrote them down. They began to experience a presence.

We read one the two creation stories found in Genesis, the other being Adam and Eve.

People of science and people of science agree on much. We can agree on the theory the NASA Web Space Telescope is confirming -- that the universe is around 13 billion years old. What we do is place God at beginning and center.

It is a profound and audacious religious claim – one that some would challenge or reject.

We go further, we read Genesis and hear that we are created in the image of God.

There are more than a few ways to come at this.

Here's one idea:

Planetary scientist and stardust expert Dr Ashley King explains how it is possible to say that we are made of stardust?

“Nearly all the elements in the human body were made in a star and many have come through several supernovas. Most of the elements of our bodies were formed in stars over the course of billions of years and multiple star lifetimes. However, it's also possible that some of our hydrogen (which makes up roughly 9.5% of our bodies) and lithium, which our body contains in very tiny trace amounts, originated from the Big Bang.”

... In God's image.

Over time the people of Israel started experiencing God in burning bushes, on mountaintops, escaping slavery in Egypt and never feeling abandoned during the decades of Exile.

Early Christians followed the tradition of our Jewish ancestors that proclaimed one God – not many. It was the same God of creation, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon, the Prophets major and minor.

With Jesus, those who met him encountered this God in flesh. God with us as we hear a lot around Christmas time. With us each day. In tragedy and triumph. In waiting and watching. In birth and in death.

And Jesus had his own relationship with the God he prayed to like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Another expression – dare we say idea – of the Divine.

And then came the Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost, and the experience of a Spirit activating and giving them strength to go out into the world.

I have an idea, God may have hinted: if you want your world to look like heaven, then join in the work of creation. Be good stewards of the land and air, move out from comfortable places, help heal the wounds of history and the bring light into the dark places of human experience.

In our Gospel we hear the Risen Christ point to this idea of how to understand how God might be experienced as we live, work and learn.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The idea of the Trinity – even if the doctrine is too dense – is that we all live in relationship with what is around us.

Human beings in the natural world. Peoples and cultures and languages separated by lines on a map. Peoples and nations cannot hide from others for too long.

One way to honor this day: a God is experienced through the relationship and balance of the three and one. Take a moment to consider the quality of our relationships.

Whom do we love and who loves us in return? Give thanks.

Who is in our circle of concern and care?

With whom are we distant or estranged?

What relationship have any chance of being reconciled on this side of heaven?

Dr. Brian Weiss, Messages from the Masters: Tapping Into the Power of Love

“Forgive the past. It is over. Learn from it and let go. People are constantly changing and growing. Do not cling to a limited, disconnected, negative image of a person in the past. See that person now. Your relationship is always alive and changing.”