



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

We are at the end of a beautiful day, in which we had about 400 people at our main service, and the bishop came and confirmed about 40 people, which is a huge number. We had Kirkin of the Tartans, which is this festival that started about 20 years ago at Christchurch Cranbrook, and has become an instant tradition.

And as part of the whole thing there was a lot of consultation and visiting with our vestry and the bishop, with the people of Christchurch Cranbrook and the Bishop. And then finally Bishop Perry and I just had this long talk. And we started out kind of with business and then all of a sudden there was a little bit of banter back and forth, and I decided I was off clock, and so when she teased me, I was going to tease her back. And then we started giggling at each other. And then we started talking and solving the problems of the world. And we were in perfect sync.

And at the end of our conversation, as she's getting into her car, I said, hey, I love you. And she said, hey, I love you too. And we looked at each other in the eyes and she said it was a good day, and she got into her car and drove away. Now, I want to be clear that I have no romantic designs on Bishop Perry. And Bishop Perry has no romantic designs on me. This would be constitutionally impossible, but that gesture, that word that was shared between us, that love that was shared between us, it was a gift and it made the day special for me, even more special than it already was.

Now, I bring this before you, not because I want to brag about loving Bishop Perry or by saying that she loves me back. But to maybe have a point of entry into the doctrine of the Trinity, because the Trinity is one of the basic beliefs of the Christian faith, and we have struggled to fully comprehend it. And that's maybe by design. The Trinity is the belief that God is not just one God, but also three persons. And we know God through the Father, through God's son, Jesus, who is the word made flesh, and through the Holy Spirit, which lives in us.

And one way in which people have tried to speak about that threefold love and that threefold being of God is to talk about a kind of gift of love between the Father, as the first person of the Trinity, with the Son or the *logos*, who is the second person of the Trinity. And this means that in their relationship, there is a giving of themselves that is so real that it becomes alive as the spirit.

In his incredible long prayerful discourse written at the turn of the fifth century, Saint Augustine said that in an act of love, there is the lover, there is the beloved, and there is the love they share. And this, he says, is an analogy of the Trinity. God is the lover, God is also the beloved, and God is the love that exists between them. And that relationship of love was so powerful and so part of who God really is that it's spilled over into creation. And if we look at anything in this world where there is any kind of love or anything at all, there is a kind of *vestigium trinitatis*, a vestige of the Trinity. It's the reason why St. Francis picked up a clover when he said that God was triune. He was looking for an easy to find everyday example of three in one, and the clover was a great example of it. A clover most days has three leaves, and yet it's one plant. So God has three persons and yet is one God.

Now, what people don't often say is that Augustine became dissatisfied with this analogy. He actually stopped using it. He comes up with it in book four and he wrote 14 books in *De Trinitate*. And the reason why he gave it up is quite interesting to me. He gave it up, he writes, because human relationships are so unstable and we are all too finite. The love that is between persons doesn't last forever. People die. Friendships break down. People move. It's too unstable to really represent God and God's unity.

And it's here that I want to take exception with St. Augustine, even though I think he was a masterful theologian and a true saint. I think the problem isn't so much that God exists at a higher unity than these broken relationships of love that we share, but I believe that God is coming towards us and unifying everything that is all too human. And when we see love, we see God even in places we least suspect it. Even in places we have a hard time seeing it. Even in places where it seems to be only momentary and ephemeral and passes away, there is something beautiful about love. Of course that means the love that is the gift of oneself to another, which is Christian *agape*, a kind of self-sacrifice or self donation, but it also exists in every kind of love. And that is the mystery of the Christian faith.

Now, all of this goes with the grain of our reading today from the book of Acts, one of the most powerful testimonies to God and the Spirit that I can find in the scriptures. It's one of my favorite parts because you have Philip who is a disciple and the Spirit tells him to approach a chariot where there's a eunuch. He comes alongside him. And keep in mind, if you will, that Eunuchs and, and foreigners were not allowed to go into the temple. They were seen as maimed people, unworthy of being priests, and yet the Spirit of God drives him to the chariot where he meets the Ethiopian eunuch and they read the scriptures together. And then the eunuch says, here's water. Let's get baptized. And Philip baptizes him and immediately the Spirit takes him away.

That to me, is a revelation and a reminder. It's a revelation that God drives us into all those places where we think God would never want us to go, where we are convinced that we will never find God, when we will encounter things that seem as if they can do nobody any good, and yet God is there. And God was that source of unity between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. And the glory of God was that moment in which this eunuch was suddenly told that he was whole and fully loved and incorporated into Christ's body through the Spirit.

May it be so for you in all the love you share. May you find in that love the gifting God who gives God's self to God and so makes all love anywhere infinite.

Amen.