



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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"The Politics of the Trinity" - The First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday - 6/7/2020

[Lessons for the First Sunday after Pentecost](#)

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I can really resonate with the lines that Paul Simon writes in this song called American Tune.

I don't know a soul who's not been battered
I don't have a friend who feels at ease
I don't know a dream that's not been shattered
Or driven to its knees

We're living through a time in which our souls are often battered. We're living through a time in which few of us feel at ease. We're living through a time in which many of us are experiencing illusions and visions and hopes and dreams going through a painful disillusioning process, a time in which they seem to shatter and fall down. And yet at the same time, I also resonate with the incredible dream that he has in the second part of the song.

I dreamed that my soul rose unexpectedly. And that the world looking back down upon himself and all that is in, that soul smiles reassuringly. I think all of us have a sense of something is in the air that is turning and something is starting to fill us with hope and something is even starting to speak about joy.

And we see a little bit of that battering and we see a little bit of that crushing experience whenever we are confronted with the injustices that we are seeing around us these days. And, yet, at the same time, we're seeing some of the hope when we see people do great things. When the mayor and the police chief of Flint decides to go and walk with the protesters rather than trying to somehow subdue them, saying to them, I love you guys before he starts to walk with them.

When the police officers in Mississippi decide to kneel down and the protestors spontaneously kneel down with them and they pray. When the national guard in Nashville, Tennessee decide to take their shields and put them behind them so

that they could face the protestors face to face. We are right to see ourselves leaping inside of ourselves. We're right to see ourselves somehow transformed.

And in the midst of all these times in which we are remade, as it were as a people, these times of connection, there are some great things that come our way. Yesterday, I was on a walk with a legislator. She had reached out to me during the week and she said that she wanted to somehow just talk about something. And so, we went for a walk yesterday and she said, you know, we need to find a way of providing neutral ground. In the midst of all the divisions we have in our country, in the midst of all the political acrimony that's going on now, the party politics, there needs to be a place for some neutral ground, and maybe your church can be that place.

And I was incredibly stunned that she thought of us that way. It was so amazing. It was such a compliment to what we're doing. And as someone who lives through the interior of this church, and I have to hear a lot of perspectives, sometimes I can get blinded to the fact that in fact, we are an incredible church. That we have this kind of ability to welcome multiple viewpoints and multiple positions, and people who adhere to rival parties, somehow they come together here and find in each other a kind of vision of what may be and what they are.

And as I was talking with her, I began to think deeply about what is it about our political life here because politics cannot just be defined in terms of the institutions that we usually say are political. Politics can't be defined in terms of party. It cannot be defined in terms of government. It also means anytime people are around each other and there's a kind of politics here. And the politics that we have been doing here for several years now is one in which we are completely and judiciously, non-aligned. We don't take sides. We don't endorse a politician or a political party.

And we are also somehow involved in the long haul. When we work on something, we work deliberately and in a disciplined way, and we work at it over the years. And finally, everything that we do here is grounded in relationship. Where somehow this relationship that we have with each other through this church, this relationship we have with each other through Christ, it is more profound than the normal way we think of politics. It's a kind of politics of God, a kind of way of being together and held together by the love of God.

And standing behind that, I wonder, is the New Testament vision of what we are meant to be. In Philippians. Paul calls the people of that community to live in communion with one another. Koinonia, he says. And Paul picks that term very deliberately because for most of the ancient world, the way that you would hold each other together would be a term called homonia; right thinking, complete agreement. But koinonia means something different, Paul writes. It means being willing to somehow share in the spirit. It also means somehow being of the same mind. By that he means the phreneo, the heart. Not just the idea, but the heart.

And so he writes to the people, make my joy complete, be of the same mind, having the same love. Being in full accord and of one mind, let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. So it is not a matter of chance that we are who we are in this church. We are who we are because we are embodying a vision of the political life of God. And in that vision there isn't an emphasis so much on right thinking or agreement or ideological purity, but rather there is an emphasis on the heart on the way we can actually welcome multiple perspectives here and promote the justice of God.

Now standing, even behind Paul's words in Philippians, there is the belief in God who is one and three. It is the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity, which we celebrate today can sometimes seem entirely abstract. And that's because it touches everything. And so it is incredibly relevant because what the doctrine of the Trinity tells us is that God is so present to us in Christ and truly God is present. And God is so present to us and the Holy Spirit and truly God is present; that God is not merely a monad, but that God is a Trinity of persons. And that you and I in knowing Jesus know God truly. And you and I in experiencing the power of the spirit to live among us, experience God fully.

So Christians believe in a kind of politics of the Trinity. That in a diversity of persons, there can be a unity, which is so profound as to make them one. And unity that is built by love, which is why Augustine, when he was writing about the Trinity, he said a good analogy for the Trinity is the relationship between a lover and a beloved, and the love they share. That loving, giving of oneself, that loving, receiving of love, that love, that bond between them in which the gift of themselves come together, that love is like God. And of course, as we read in first, John, that love is God; God is love.

And because we are a society that has been shaped by the Trinity, that has been touched by the Trinity, that is truly of the Trinity, so there is a kind of unity in diversity and a kind of diversity in unity here. And whenever we say or exclude anyone, we go against the grain of what God wants us to do. And whenever we don't hear the cry of justice when it comes to us, it's as if we are somehow avoiding a call that God is calling us to listen to a voice that will change us and transform us and make us more of whom God is calling us to be, to truly be in this moment, to truly be a place where people who feel a bit like their soul has been battered, to feel a little bit like they have their dreams shattered.

We are the place. And which people come together and find grace and the sacred place of this church is not the building itself, but the community we have, the Communion and the Holy Spirit because you and I have been invited into the politics of the Trinity. And that means that you and I have to be a place that is non-aligned. You and I have to be a place in which we are in issues of justice for the long haul. You and I have to be a place in which we are grounded in

relationship, and that relationship is powerful enough to withstand any disagreement and any test to it.

Artists have struggled to somehow communicate that dynamic power of love in the Trinity. And I find myself constantly critiquing every effort to do so, save one. William Blake in 1794, in one of his notebooks sketched this piece, and it's a kind of riff on a longstanding way of depicting the Trinity and the Western canon. Typically, if you look at the Trinity, as it's represented, you have this picture of Christ on the Cross and He is sitting there completely nailed in and completely wounded and completely frozen in time.

And then you have God the Father behind Christ holding up the Cross with his hands and God, the father looks like a bit of an older version of Christ, a kind of old man from which we kind of get the image of the old man has God in our minds. And then God, the Holy Spirit is this little bird that kind of flies in the background, or it comes out of nowhere and seems to be a reminder that we can't really know where God is, that the spirit is always moving.

But when Blake takes this incredibly common image, he reinterprets it powerfully because here, God the Father is on His knees and He is welcoming home God the Son, in fact, God the Son is not turned towards the viewer, but God the Son is turned towards God the Father with His arms outstretched to remind them of the Cross. And God the Holy Spirit is this large life-sized person who is flying like a bird and yet hovering above them with arms wide to embrace them both.

And each of them are in some ways equal because each of them are equal, because each of them is God, because together they are God, because in the diversity of these persons, there is a unity. And that unity is not just substance, that they're both part of God, that unity that they share with one another is a kind of love that we know by compassion.

Blake wants us to see that from before the foundation of the world, God was a trinity of persons in infinite love. And that love spilled over into creation and all the ways we experience love now, in all the ways we drop our shoulders now, in all the ways we embrace what we don't know now, in all the ways we welcome people we don't know now, in all the ways we forgive now, in all the ways we repent now, in all the ways we return now, in all the ways we love now, all of these things only magnify the love that is at the center of the universe. And although you and I will often experience this love as pain and suffering, the promise of the Trinity Blake wants us to see is even that is gathered into the heart of God. God as Trinity encompasses, even in those moments when we feel as if we're a bit battered and shattered and need to be gathered into the love of God.

So you and I have been called to worship the unity of the Trinity. That is what we read today in our collect. You and I are called to somehow think about what unifies God and what unity we are called into. And too often churches like

ourselves have defined unity as uniformity. Too often churches like ourselves have created unity out of force and power.

Too often churches like ourselves have somehow created for ourselves a unity that is a kind of ideology, a kind of right thinking or group thinking. But in fact, the unity that you and I are called to is a unity of love, and love bears all things and hopes all things and believes all things and love endures more than faith, more than hope says St. Paul.

At the end of our reading from 2 Corinthians, Paul says the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. What an incredible way to end a letter. But in fact, when Paul invokes the Trinity, he's naming the beginning because in God, with every ending, there is a new beginning. And may when this virus runs this course, and may when we go through the process of self examination and reform that we are being invited to do as a country, when all of these things run their course and come to an end, may we realize that we were not at the end, but the beginning of what God the Holy Trinity is calling us to now and forever.

Amen.