

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

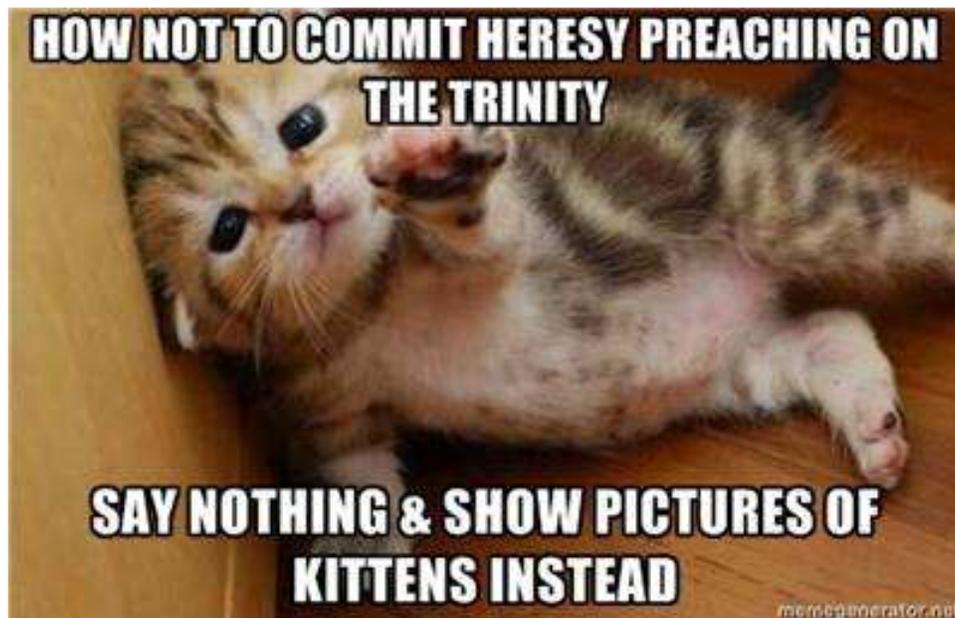
May 22, 2016

Trinity Sunday

John 16:12-15

Perichoresis

It's Trinity Sunday. The day when it is incredibly easy to try to explain the mystery of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to end up either committing heresy or making everything even harder to understand. In fact, there was a meme circulating around the Internet this week. It features an adorable kitten and has these words: "How not to commit heresy on preaching the Trinity: Say nothing and show pictures of kittens instead."



While that might be fun, we really don't have the capabilities (you know, without the screen and projector and all).... But there is some wisdom here — in that trying to explain the doctrine of the trinity, so that it all makes sense, is an exercise in futility.

Plenty of volumes have been written explaining the relationship of the three persons to each other and the relationship of the whole of the Trinity to us — I've written and preached plenty of sermons, which seek to do that I'm sure. One year I printed a diagram in the bulletin (again, if we had a projector, I'd show it to you...) It was a triangle with each point being a person of the trinity lines between them indicating that the Father is NOT the Son and is NOT the Holy Spirit.... and so on, but that God IS the Father and IS the Son and IS the Holy Spirit.

Clear as mud?

But this year I'll keep it simple — by introducing you to a single word.

Perichoresis

Greek *peri*, "around" and *chorein*, which a few meanings including "to make room for."

A better image for perichoresis is a circle—in particular a circular dance of the three persons in God. Call it the divine choreography, if you will. It's a dance of life and love that is never-ending as each person waltzes with the others in a divine eagerness to make known the riches of each other. The Father pours

out everything onto the Son. The Spirit takes all that from the Son to pour out these riches on all other people. Each one of the three exudes enthusiasm for the other two.

The point here is the utter unity of the three persons in God and how each so freely contributes to the further glory of the other two persons. We have here the ultimate deferential community of sharing. Glory comes when each person promotes the other two.

Some while ago three other drivers and I all arrived at a Four-Way Stop intersection at virtually the same moment. The rule at Four-Way Stops is that drivers take turns in a clockwise fashion starting with whoever got to the intersection first. In this case, the four of us arrived all at the same time, and so no one knew what to do.

What happened instead is that each of the four of us was making hand gestures to encourage someone to go first. After being momentarily stuck with no one moving, the next thing you knew, all four of us crept forward a bit at the same moment! Again we all stopped and again we all encouraged each other to go first. After lots of silly grins and laughter among us four strangers, eventually we managed to get someone to go first. It was the complete opposite of what often characterizes road rage—we were terminally deferential! It was hilarious and wonderful at the same time.

I think that something of that kind of deferential joy must characterize the interior life of God. There is something wonderful about a shared love and a shared enthusiasm that is so intense, it results in a never-ending dance of affirmation and celebration. The reading from the Gospel of John today is pretty short. Yet packed into these five sentences is a dance of relationships that makes up the holy community that is God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Christians talk a lot about loving God, and half the time we make it sound as though everyone already knows what that love looks like. We know well enough what it is to love another person. When you love someone, you do so for lots of reasons:

 you love how she makes you laugh,
 you love how thoughtful he is,
 you love how smart she is,
 you love how he likes nature...

Yet over and above such specifics, there is at the core of it all a fundamental delight that this unique person is there at all, is alive, and is in relationship with you.

In her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "Gilead," Marilynne Robinson shows her narrator, 76-year-old Rev. John Ames, pondering the enormous love he feels for his little seven-year-old son. At one point Rev. Ames writes to his son,

There's a shimmer on a child's hair, in the sunlight. There are rainbow colors in it, tiny, soft beams of just the same colors you can see in the dew sometimes. Your hair is straight and dark and your skin is very fair. I suppose you're not prettier than most children. You're just a nice-looking boy, a bit slight, well scrubbed and well mannered. All that is fine, but it's your existence I love you for, mainly. Existence seems to me now the most remarkable thing that could ever be imagined.

Maybe loving God is like that...it begins with the sheer delight we take in the fact that God exists at all. It begins in the wonder we feel when we try to wrap our minds around the Trinitarian mystery of three who are somehow still just one.

It is fitting that we bump up against the mystery of the Trinity—which cannot be explained but which is understood more with the heart than the head—that Trinity Sunday is also Music Appreciation Sunday for us.

Victor Hugo said,
"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and cannot remain silent."
That which cannot be put into words - our love for God...
And that which cannot remain silent - our love for God...

Amen!