

**Trinity Sunday (C). May 22, 2016. John 16:12-15; Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31.
The Baptism of Abraham Luke Hanna Harrison and Elena Maria Mei Wong.**

Every preaching resource I consulted for this week, Trinity Sunday, begins with a groan. The least-despairing commentary I looked at began with “This can be a wonderful Sunday, as long as you don’t talk about the Trinity.” Trinity Sunday is apparently a deeply unpopular Sunday among preachers, or at least among those who write for preachers. Now, I get it: the Trinity is hard to understand. But then, so is Easter, so is Christmas, so is Pentecost. These great days, though, at least have very cool stories associated with them, whereas today the texts seem to be chosen by a rubric of “these New Testament passages mention all three, and this passage from the Hebrew Bible talks about something kind of divine that is somehow both with God and distinct, so let’s use them.” The other great feasts of the Christian year spring from and get assigned amazing bible stories, while the Trinity beckons us forward with fourth-century debates hinging on concepts like hypostasis, perichoresis, and that thrilling controversy between homoousia versus homoiousia.

We have an option for a way out today. This morning [at 10:30] we will be baptizing two babies, Abraham and Elena, and so we could just tiptoe past Trinity Sunday and instead focus on the joy of baptism. [And indeed, we are making those baptisms central to our worship even here at 8:00, as we’ll be remembering our baptisms here and renewing our baptismal covenant.] But I don’t think we should [take the tiptoe path around the Trinity]. As you may remember, we baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, the classic Trinitarian formula, and today’s confluence of baptism and Trinity Sunday gives us a chance to think about what on earth we think we’re saying and what on earth we think we’re doing at baptisms. So I think we should talk about the trinity today, and I’m confident that it can still be a wonderful Sunday.

Some folks get a lot of mileage in pointing out that the word “trinity” does not appear in the bible. Nor does any passage in the bible clearly lay out the answers to the many questions over which many folks have fought regarding the Trinity through history. But this doesn’t mean that it’s just old Greek philosophical nonsense that people came up with back when they had nothing better to do, like checking facebook and posting pictures of the food they’re about to eat. The doctrine of the trinity—most simply stated as “God is three in one,” but always carrying with it a whole mess of very confusing and seemingly archaic jargon—developed as Christians tried to make sense out of the way they were experiencing God. As with all of the best theology, it started with prayer and then progressed to, Hmmm, we’re praying like this—what do you think that means?

Now yes, some of the technicalities seem a little removed from the pressing issues of our everyday lives. But if you just cut right through the technicalities, the most important meaning of the doctrine of the trinity is that the truest thing we can say about God is that God is loving community. And that actually makes a considerable difference. When your basic idea of God is a divine community of love, rather than an isolated king sitting in some nowhere far away, then your faith is affected. And then it’s easier to make sense of biblical passages like those we read this morning from Proverbs and the Gospel of John. Then we’re not surprised by Proverbs, where Wisdom is dancing in the presence of God, where God is delighting in her and she is delighting in God and Wisdom is

delighting in humanity. Or this picture of the trinitarian life Jesus gives us in John, which is fundamentally a picture of a completely shared life. Jesus says “All that the Father has is mine” and that the Spirit “will take what is mine and declare it to you.” The life of the Trinitarian god is one in which all is shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but then all that stuff is also shared with us.

The truest thing we can say about God is that God is loving community, delighting in itself and in us, inviting us into that shared life and into that delight. Our life together as the community of folks baptized in the name of this God is constituted by the delight and love of God. And today we’re baptizing two people into this community—not principally the community of St. Christopher’s, though that too—but first the community of folks throughout the world and history who gather around this delightful and delighted love of God. We will renew our baptismal covenant, reminding ourselves of the community of faith, hope, and love that we want to be and sometimes, just for a moment, are.

There’s a great line where a parent asked a bishop what she should tell her child about the Trinity, and the bishop replied “as little as possible.” There’s some truth to that, but finally the life of the Trinity is the model for our life as the community of the baptized: a shared life of love that is full of delight and is for others. That is what we are claiming for Elena and Abraham today [at 10:30]. And it is the life that we are almost daring ourselves into as we renew our baptismal covenant. We aren’t supposed to have a complete understanding of it, with a nice bow on top; we are supposed to be learning to live it, together. Amen.