



ST BART'S

A Sermon by

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“Stop in the Name of Love!” (with Apologies to the Supremes)

Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, June 15, 2014

The First Sunday After Pentecost: Trinity Sunday—Based on Matthew 28:16-20

Last week, while I was at home in bed with a cold, Buddy, our Rector—which is church talk for “my boss”—went beyond the hyperbole so common among preachers from the South and announced that next Sunday “one of his colleagues would reveal all that there is that you need to know about the Trinity.” Now with all due respect, I would like to ask....What was he thinking? Was he concerned that the Sunday after Pentecost and before the Summer Festival of Sacred Music was scheduled to begin might be a low attendance Sunday, and did you he hope to beef up attendance by making false promises? Had he forgotten who exactly was preaching this Sunday? Rather than making up any more stories about what was going on in the mind of my boss and getting myself further into trouble, let me simply state that although I will try to do my best, I don't want you to be disappointed when I am finished, and I was unable to reveal all that there is that you need to know about the Trinity, because I am not sure I am up to all that—after all, I have not been feeling good.

Ultimately the point is that one never really does know what is going on in another person's mind, and what we often do is take what happened and make up stories about what happened. The stories help us to understand and explain the behavior of others. Of the many stories that one can make up, have you noticed that the stories that persist are the ones that confirm our already established view of the person or persons involved? The problem is that many of us do not distinguish the difference between the story and the person. We confuse our stories, which at best serve as a road map, with the reality of the mystery of that very person. This is why it is easy to feel frustrated and disappointed when people contradict the stories we have already made up about them. It is equally easy to feel smug when people act exactly as we expect them to. The problem with our stories is that sometimes our stories create the reality into which the person is living, and sometimes our stories become the stories they tell themselves, stories that do not give them freedom to act differently.

In the end Buddy made a joke about the fact that he would not have to preach this week, and people laughed. That is the story I like and it is my story and I am sticking to it. If we are prone to create stories about other people, how much more are we prone to do it when we talk about God? We create stories out of nothing, and the stories create the world and the ways in which we understand that world. In the book of Genesis there are two different stories about God and how the world was created. The second story tells of God creating man from the dust of the earth and then creating woman from man. For many years this second story was used to justify the precedence of men over women. Recently a different interpretation of the same story has emerged. Instead of justifying the oppression of women, the new interpretation suggests that men were just a divine rough draft—with the emphasis on rough. The other story of creation tells of God creating the earth and all that is in it by speaking them into to existence. Maybe you remember the words, “Then God said let there be light; and there was light.” Notice if you will the way in which God's speaking creates reality. The role of God's language in creating the world underscores the importance of language we use as we create stories to explain the worlds in which we live. Later in the same story God said, “Let us make humanity in our own image, according to our likeness and so God created humanity in God's image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” This part of this creation story tells us that we are created, male and female, in the image of God. Humanity is a unity with diverse expressions.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a story that was told by Christian people to explain the fact that Jesus had talked about being one with God the Father and promised to send the Holy Spirit. These confounding statements confused the early Christians. Was there one God or three? It was clear that Jesus did not have an “I-Thou” relationship with God, but rather Jesus experienced the reality of being one with God and wanted to share that experience with us. On the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed that we would all be one as he and the Father were one: Jesus in us and we in him that we might all be one as he and the Father are one. He also commanded that we love one another and told us that everyone will know that we are his disciples if we have love for one another. It took several hundred years, but the Church finally agreed on the story that God was one being in three persons. And preachers and teachers have been trying to explain exactly what that meant ever since.

Ed Bacon, the Rector of All Saints Church in Pasadena, California describes the enterprise of God as “turning the human race into the human family.” I actually believe that the doctrine of Trinity goes beyond the idea of a human family.

This God who is three and yet one calls us beyond all our stories—and beyond all the stories which separate us from each other and from God—into a larger story of relationship and love. The Trinitarian-story God is a story where the other becomes self and the self is found in the other. Where there is no second or third person, no you or him or her or, especially, them; instead there is just us. It is a story that answers what Erich Fromm in *The Art of Loving* calls “the deepest need of humanity, the need to overcome separateness, to leave the prison of aloneness.” It is a story of love. Fromm describes love as “a union under the condition of preserving one’s integrity, one’s individuality. Love is an active power, a power which breaks through the walls which separate us and unites us with others; love is the paradox of two beings becoming one and yet remaining two and being one.” But this love that is God goes beyond the two becoming one and points to everything becoming one. No you or him or her and, especially, no them: all is us. It is a powerful story that calls us to understand that our welfare and the welfare of the world and the welfare of all that is in our hands and calls us to create stories of love, stories that reflect the love of God and that create space for love to be manifest. In the name of Love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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