

## Jelly Hands

Today is Trinity Sunday. Unlike Pentecost or Easter or Christmas, it is the only holy day that celebrates a dogma, an article of faith, rather than something that happened in our history of salvation.

It is a day many clergy dread to preach the sermons that you dread to hear.

All with good reason.

As my wife says about various centuries old articles of our faith: "Huh?!"

She's not alone.

When we think of the Trinity as our effort to describe the nature of God, we are, as one man put it: like oysters trying to describe a ballerina.

We can't do it.

The differences are too vast.

But that hasn't stopped many from trying and there are all kinds of fantastically complicated efforts to explain how God is three persons yet with one nature.

St. Augustine of Hippo wrote 17 volumes on the Trinity. It took 10 years to complete!

Karl Barth, who Preston is still wading through, devotes hundreds of pages to the topic, Thomas Aquinas even more.

Do you feel the glaze coming over your eyes?

There's an old Peanuts cartoon that says a lot about these efforts to explain God.

Linus, who has been chomping on a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, stops to admire his hands.

He says to Lucy: "Hands are fascinating things! I like my hands...I think I have nice hands. My hands seem to have a lot of character."

He goes on: "These are hands that may someday accomplish great things."

"These are hands that may someday do marvelous works!"

"They may build mighty bridges or heal the sick or hit home runs or write soul-stirring novels."

"These hands --- may change the course of destiny!" he cries out to Lucy.

Lucy looks at Linus' hands and deadpans: "They've got jelly on them."

Our theories and explanations of God, sophisticated and insightful and lengthy as they may be, all have jelly on them.

None come close.

All miss the mark.

After all, how can an oyster explain a ballerina?

Or, as a master says: "If I had a God whom I could understand, I would never hold Him to be God."

My Buddhist friends have taught me about koans.

You know them. They are the sayings given to students to contemplate. Sayings like: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

You can't answer it. You can only sit with it and see where it takes you.

The Trinity is something like a koan.

It is to be sat with, not explained; contemplated, not dissected.

And if we sit with it, what we may slowly come to realize is that while we can never explain or dissect God, we can come to know something of the nature of God; something about what God is like.

And in coming to know these things, we come to know how we, made in the image of God, are called to be in this world.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of God is God's compassion.

Compassion meaning putting myself in your shoes, and you in mine: seeing the world through each other's eyes, and in that, coming to understand his story, her pain, our joy.

That deist God, the one who simply made it all and took an extended vacation, leaving us to sort everything out on our own, that God has no compassion.

That God is alone, too far beyond to relate to us. Yet most modern Christians are Deist to the core.

The God of the Bible, the God of Jesus, the God of our faith, is very different.

This God is, of God's very nature, in relationship with God and in relationship with us.

And because of that relationship, our God, the Living God, the True God, the Only God, has placed himself squarely inside your shoes and mine, your pain and mine, your story and mine.

In the creation story that we heard at length today, this very good creation, entrusted to us, wasn't taken away even when we said "no" to God.

The love of the Creator remained, uplifted, and guided our ancestors.

From the prodigal son who is welcomed home with open arms to the birds and lilies of the field, cared for without effort; to the rain falling on the good and the bad alike; to the feeding of the multitudes; to the story of the Good Samaritan, all are stories of God's compassion for us.

In Jesus' native tongue, Aramaic, the word "compassion" comes from the same root as the word for "womb."

God, through the prophet Jeremiah, says this:

"Is Israel my dear son? My darling child? For the more I speak of him, the more I remember him. Therefore my womb trembles for him; I will truly shower motherly compassion upon him." Jer 31:20

Some folks go nuts at the mere mention of God being both father and mother.

Some will claim it's a modern invention, starting somewhere around 1968.

But there it is; from the mouth of a prophet, on the pages of ancient Holy Scripture, that is considerably older than 1968.

Sit with the image.

You and I, and all of humanity, snuggled safely in the womb of God.

Can there be any greater intimacy?

It is this compassion that over flows out of the mystery of the Trinity.

Count it all Joy!

As Meister Eckhart describes it: "God the Father laughed, and the Son was born. Then the two of them laughed, and the Spirit was born. When all three laughed, humanity was born."

At the very heart of creation is laughter.

No wonder God told Abraham to name his only son "Laughter;" which in Hebrew is: "Isaac."

And so a light heart, a ready smile, a playful laugh, is sheer delight to our God.

Or think of it this way: the mystery of the Trinity might also be glimpsed in the dance.

Three, twirling about, in a circle of moving love, inviting us all to join in.

If you hesitate, they will wait, for the dance is an *open* circle, inviting you in over and over again.

Paul today gives us a clue about how we might join in the dance.

Put things in order, agree with one another, live in peace; greet one another with a holy kiss.

And finally, as Jesus gathers the eleven on that mountain and sends them out into the whole wide world, they know they are being commissioned by the one who walks the talk: he who stands before them, resurrected, bears the mark of God's great YES to all that Jesus is, to all that Jesus teaches.

Out they go, out we go, to the impossible task of convincing the world that all of its accepted wisdom of power and might and self-interest is a fool's errand.

Those eleven, like we today, can only go because God's Spirit, the very Spirit of Jesus, is with us; and it is with us until the end of time.

God the Father --- above us.

God the Son --- beside us.

God the Holy Spirit --- within us.

A koan indeed.

A mystery indeed.

I invite you to sit with it, in wonder.

And in your sitting, may the Triune God invade your heart, grasp your soul, and bring you home.

Jelly hands and all.

+amen