

Pastor Roy's Sermon from July 21, 2013

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I will be preaching on the elements of our worship services over the next few months. We will still use the lectionary readings.

The strength of our liturgy is that it contains enough Scripture and healthy spiritual practices to nurture us on our pilgrimage. This is a good thing since even the most inspired preachers have off Sundays and most of us tend to preach repetitively. We look at diverse passages and the same truths come to us week after week. Even when we set out to preach something unique, the same thoughts and ideas tend to come to the surface.

So it's a good thing that the liturgy we follow and the hymns we use are so rich. They are a saving grace. If we pay attention to what we are saying, we will be refreshed by the truth of Christian faith as it is proclaimed in the rhythms of the year.

So what is the first element of our worship? We invoke the name of God. . . "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Our worship is Trinitarian. What does this mean?

Naturally, it means something slightly different to each person. If you have ever been confused by our three in one understanding of God, then you are not alone. Anyone who ponders the doctrine of the Trinity has been perplexed. What could be more filled with mystery and unattainable depths than the nature of God? How can we perfectly understand that for which we have no senses to sense?

In our faith, I believe we do better not to demand that people believe specific concepts about God. We cannot change what we think in our heads about who holds all this together. And God is God whether we perfectly understand what that means or not. Clearly in his teachings, Jesus is more concerned with how we live than what we specifically believe about God. Our love and service to God flows best out of God's grace and mercy. If we fear harsh judgment, we will miss the essence of our faith. The essence is God's call to relationship. Not just a relationship with God, but a relationship with all of God's creation. God's nature calls us to relationship.

Trinity is God in relationship. Trinity is redemption. Trinity is Spirit. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of God which fills the universe and has called all things into being. Now, this Spirit dwells within us as well. The icons of the Trinity show it well, each member of the Godhead is looking at the others, somehow leaning toward the others, physically and spiritually. Their unity is key, and yet the members have their own expressions.

Sometimes we think, as Christians, that Three in One is an exclusive reality—a club to which we belong and others do not. That Christians must believe it and non Christians do not believe or practice it. I suggest that Trinity must be inclusive—God draws all things to Godself.

There is no partisanship in the power which holds the universe together. We find this mystical inclusiveness in the sky at night, in the storm which cools the hot summer air, in birth and death, in a parent or friend's love. We find it in the Samaritan's kindness—unexpected expressions of God's mercy from unexpected sources. We find this inclusiveness in the way all the plants and animals on this planet are about the same business.

This unity is present in the story of Abraham and the visitors. The guests are curiously one and they have a common mission. God is present among them and relates to Abraham.

The writer of Colossians suggests that the fullness of God dwelled in Jesus Christ and everything of value finds its value in the Spirit of Christ. In Christ is God's judgment that compassionate mercy is the basis of all life. This gracious love is revealed in the life and death of Jesus. The Spirit of God is life and hope infused in love. If it sounds complicated, it's because I'm not doing a very good job expressing it.

This is true simplicity. Trinity is love in relationship. Relationships invite and include. Fear excludes and builds walls. Colossians speaks of Jesus Christ in universal all inclusive terms.

The Universal all encompassing Christ Spirit is who greets us in the morning. When we drink refreshing water, we drink Christ into our Spirits. As the stream becomes the river and into the sea, the unity of the water is the Christ Spirit in the world. Christ is love drawing all things unto God. The narrowness of the Gospel is not believing something which is difficult to believe, but the narrow vision of mercy that resists all fear, and intimidation, and violence, rage, and even subtle forms of arrogance. Narrow is this form of radical openness to whatever God is doing in this moment, resisting the urge to make God into our own image. It's a challenge every moment. It requires the discipline of simple humility and a spirit of yes to God.

Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

Martha is headed down the broad way, the way of following what feels natural—making everything work the way she wants it, the way she needs it to work. "Make my sister help me!"

But what thing has Mary found? Listening, love, taking time to think about Jesus' teachings, the unifying power of stillness, letting go of the need to control and conquer? Practicing compassionate mercy and faithfulness? Making decisions not based on fear, but on what we learn in the presence of God?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Yes here is a unity which includes, which draws near, which shows mercy, which brings peace. A power which cannot be overcome. A life which cannot die. A life which finds infinite connections and strength wherever it dwells. A love which knows no bounds. A trusting abundance which need not fear or force its way. A mercy which is not afraid to die a thousand deaths, to let go of the little me for the Big Me found in God.

In our worship we celebrate that this God is the reason we have hope and peace. In our worship we set aside all other gods and distractions. In our worship, we wait in the presence of this God. Nothing else is worthy of our worship, of our all.

Thanks be to God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer/Sanctifier. Amen.