

Trinity Lutheran Church
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Divine Dance

Was it hard to go back to work this week after the holiday? I got into work on Monday, and I said, "I need a change," so I moved one thing over to the other side of my office and then I moved another thing, then pretty soon, the whole office was reorganized. Then I called my wife, and she said, "Do you know what I did this morning? I got to work and I realized I needed a change and I reorganized my office." So we both did that without consulting the other or planning it. I wonder how many people in the world did that this past week...reorganized, if not the office, some attic or closet or corner of the bedroom or something. Good time for that. It's a new year, and we spend a lot of time inside.

I prayed about this with the town council as they did their reorganizational meeting on Friday night here in town. I said a prayer about rediscovering God as we reorganize our lives. Just as you uncover, perhaps, an old picture or a treasured item as you reorganize a closet, may we find that this year. So that's my prayer for you as well.

It's an opportunity today, since it is Epiphany, and Epiphany talks about a revelation from God in a new way, to perhaps do some of that reorganizing and rediscovery of God, to find Him in a new place, or in a new way. The text that we celebrate today, the baptism of our Lord, described the Holy Trinity. So what I'd like to do starting today and over the next couple of weeks, is to help reorganize and re-enliven and refresh for you your relationship with God and your faith by talking about this basic doctrine...the doctrine of the Trinity.

It's probably the foundational doctrine of Christianity. We've talked about what makes the Lutheran Church unique, grace alone and faith alone, things like that. If you take a step back and ask, "What makes Christianity unique," you're going to come back to this doctrine of the Trinity. You know so often what happens with doctrines in the church is that they become something that we know about instead of something that we really experience, something that we feel.

So that's point one this morning...is that what I'm hoping will happen is by exploring this thing called the Trinity, this God we have that is three, that we might reorganize our inner furniture, so to speak, and rediscover God in a way that really enlivens us, that we can really experience something different through the Trinity.

Trinity...the word does not exist in the New Testament. It took the church about 400 years of thinking and living this to discover it, but it's there as we read how Jesus had this dove descend on Him and a Person who was different than Him, obviously, speaking from heaven at His baptism. So this phenomenon in the Bible of this Father, Son, Holy Spirit, the church coined a word for that...Trinity. I guess we could use a different word, but that one seemed to stick. It seemed to be the most helpful for saying God is three.

There is another word in the Greek...*perichoresis*, that's the word for dancing. I like that just to begin with as a word that describes the Trinity. It's a divine dance. It's a dynamic motion. It's a wonderful thing as you think about this dove coming down, this dynamism of relationship between the three persons, *perichoresis*. So that's really point one, it has to be something dynamic and something that is felt.

Do we have any Jets fans here? All right. Good. My son is not so sure about that. He says, "You know the Jets stink." I say, "Yeah, but they've been winning games." He said, "Yeah, but my friends say they stink." Okay. Well, if you're a Jets fan or a Yankee's fan, or any good fan, you know the difference between going to the game and just reading about the game in the newspaper the next day or even seeing it on TV, right? That is so often what happens with doctrines like the Trinity, if we just sort of know about them, but we don't experience them.

I have an article on my door. You can come and take a look at it. It's about U2, my favorite group. I have to mention this at least once a month in a sermon, but they had a concert this past fall, and it was so incredible, and we didn't spend much money on it, but we amazingly got to be right down by the stage. I could regale you for hours talking about this concert. But you know what? I could never really pass that experience on to you, could I? ...unless you were there. Don't we often have experiences like that, that are really hard to pass on in words to someone else.

This often happens with doctrines, especially a doctrine like the Trinity. We sort of know, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but unless we really live a Trinity experience, it will be hard to connect to it. It's going to be hard to be at the game, to be at the concert. So that's my first point, and my first goal with this is to do this in such a way where we can reorganize our experience and re-liven our experience of God and to really feel His presence by going back to the basics... Trinity, baptism, the dove descending.

So let me start with this first angle with you, and ask you to put your thinking caps on now. Can you just name for me one area or issue in the world that has two sides? It could be, probably is, a conflict. One area in the world or in the country that has two sides. There is more than one answer, and I'm looking for more than one answer. So if you think of one, just shout it out. Some area or issue that has two sides. Global warming. Okay, very good. The greens and the, I don't know what you call the other side, the reds, I guess.

What's another issue? Creation and evolution, very good. Others? Abortion, pro-choice, pro-life. Yes, that's probably the one that would come to mind first, I would think. It's a really big one. Any others you can think of? Taxation. Okay. Yeah. Boy, a lot of these are political, aren't they? Might tell us something. Anything else? Issues in the world. Healthcare. Okay, a lot of these we're experiencing right now as a country and wondering which way our Congress is going to go or our president is going to go.

Other issues? War. Yeah, what are some of the recurring, two-sided conflicts in the world? Palestine/Israel, I was hoping somebody would say that. Yeah, that's a big one...always, always in the news. Have's and have not's. Republicans and Democrats. There we go. That's a good one. Yeah, that just never goes away, does it? Never goes away. Immigration. We could probably

keep listing these all day once we got going, couldn't we? Red Socks and Yankees. Okay, there we go. Now see I lived in Boston for a little while, so I don't want to be on the wrong side of down on this one.

Yeah, so there are all sorts of competitions and two-sided. Do you know what that's called? That's called a duality or a polarity, when there are two sides to something. Now push that a little further, and if you could picture now imagine the last really serious, intense argument you got into with somebody. Could be a husband, wife, coworker, parent, child...a serious argument, the last one you got into. Didn't it feel like you were on one side and they were on the other side and never the twain shall meet? Ships passing in the night? Or maybe colliding in the night? That's another polarity, a duality, two sides. Those are the ones we really live personally and could perhaps cause a great deal of pain, sometimes lasting for years.

Push it a little further. Have you ever felt pulled in two directions inside of yourself? I used to have this problem in college. I was a double major. I'm not sure the wisdom of being a double major, now looking back on it because I always was killing myself saying, "Should I take this class or this class? Should I be at this place at this time or this place at this time?" It was too many interests, a curse of too many things going on. Pulled in too many directions. So we can set up that polarity inside.

Another way that happens is when we trick ourselves with a duality, or we set up an extreme position that we can't really get ourselves out of. Let me give you an example. It is New Years, I'm going to set a resolution to lose 25 pounds or nothing. Is that going to work? I paralyze myself with that sort of extremism, right? That's black and white duality, but we do this inside of ourselves, don't we? I wonder if that sort of thing that goes on inside is what leads to all of these other magnified conflicts we just named around the world? It starts in here, doesn't it?

What's the solution to this duality? Did you know physicists and scientists and chemists, they know that bodies in space, the really significant thing about them is not their essence of themselves, but their relationship. The dynamic force between the proton and the electron, the dynamic force between planets is what is significant. They have to focus on that as though that's a third thing.

Did you know that marriage counselors and any good counselors with more than one party involved, but especially marriage counselors will say there is a husband and there is the wife and then there is the marriage, which is almost like a third person. They treat it like a third person. They have to teach the husband and the wife to treat it like a third person. Sometimes in those relationships, there is actually another third person hanging around, but the reason is because they haven't identified that the marriage already is a third person. In other words, a human relationship is so strong that there is *you*, there is *me*, and there is something else that's called *our relationship*.

It's the space between the planets, between the atoms, between the molecules, it's the space between us that is the significant thing. Think about that for a minute. That third thing, that third person, what is that? See if science knows this and marriage counselors know this, and much secular literature in all fields seems to recognize this, how much more can we recognize this

when we hear this text about Jesus being baptized and the dynamic relationship of love and embrace between the Father and the Son is so significant, and so powerful that it is, itself, a third Person. Fantastic! If that's too abstract for you, God gives us a picture of a dove so that you know this is something peaceful, peace bringing, harmonizing.

We know we have to have third parties in these conflicts we just named... ambassadors, diplomats, mediators, that's what that's for, to try and reach some third alternative between side one and side two. You know from your personal arguments that you've had that unless you reach some sort of place where the two parties, the two people, can come to a position where they're each supporting each other and coming to a good agreement, it's not going to happen. That's that third solution. That's an acknowledgement of the relationship.

What do you have to do to resolve a conflict but return to the relationship? Say, "How's it going, really, between you and me?" Then you're addressing that third thing, that third person. I wonder if we can experience God in a new way by feeling that reality that's all around us all the time. That's a Trinitarian reality, isn't it? We're surrounded by it.

It's kind of scary to think that if this is reality... God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... and we experience this three-ness all the time every day, but we're not aware of it, how does that affect us? I wonder if that's the reason we have these perennial conflicts with only two sides and no, never the twain shall meet because there is no acknowledgement of that third Person of the God who is three, of the peace-bringing dove who can solve those dualities.

So here's a question for you on this Epiphany, a couple of questions. First of all, where is the number three? Where is the number three happening in your life and you're not aware of it? Go back to the conflict or the argument that you last had. Where is there a need to address, not your position, my position, but the relationship to say, "How are we doing, really?" Where is the number three needing to be rediscovered as you reorganize things a little bit? To discover that dynamic, and the dynamic is there already, it's just that we didn't see it.

That's the thing about this revelation of this dove coming down. The dove is there at baptism, we just have a hard time seeing it. That's the mystery of the Trinity. He is there; we just have a hard time discovering that it's there. So we need to remove the obstacles to discovering that. Where is that number three functioning, happening, existing in your life, and maybe you just haven't been aware of it?

Second question... where does the dove come down for you, the bringer of peace? Where can it come down for you? I was in the grocery store recently, and I always try to work the lines to see if I can get into the shortest one. Do you ever do this? You see which light is going to come on next at the next stand and get into that line. Then Murphy's Law... I always get into the line that takes the longest anyway because the tape runs out or something or the manager needs to come over. Then they don't have the key to the register or something like that. Does that ever happen to anybody else?

This past week I was in the line, and I thought, *Oh, I'm doing good. I'm in the shortest line.* Pretty soon, the check out person was literally bagging the person's groceries this slowly, one at

a time. Then, do you know what happened when she got to the top of the bag? It spilled on the floor. But I thought to myself, *I wonder if even in this ordinary of a circumstance, could that dove descend in a light on our shoulder?*

Could that number three, that third Person of the Trinity be part of our daily life in such a way that it will affect us when we're in that grocery line, that it would affect us when we were in the long line of traffic with the kids going crazy in the back, that would affect us when we are having a financial train wreck at work, or when we are having that argument again and get caught up into the pattern? Where does that dove come down?

I pray this year, starting with this Epiphany, that you'll be able to do some reorganizing and rediscovering of the Trinity, of this God who is ever present and is our reality all the time, dynamic in the spaces between us, and that you'll be able to take advantage of your baptism in such a way as to see that this dove comes down for you even in the most ordinary times and even in the most ordinary ways.

When we see that that dove is there inside that will begin to resolve some of those internal conflicts maybe that we've had all our lives pulled in one direction or another. When that happens, and only when that happens, will we see some of the world's conflicts come to peace.

May that Epiphany blessing come upon you and upon our world, starting now with Jesus' blessing. In His name, and in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We'll now receive the offering.