

The Holy Trinity 2020
(Genesis1, 2Cor13:11-13, Matt28:16-20)

Let's start with describing relationships.

You might pursue relationships. Maybe you thought, I want to be married and have children, or had ambition to move up the career ladder or to make a difference. Other relationships are just a result, like that you worked hard and happened to wind up promoted. A relationship might even be enforced. For example, a court could mandate a toddler needs a parent or guardian to preserve the necessities of life.

Describing relationships could be like somebody trying to guess by peering through your window right now, or sorting through old mail in your recycling bin, which might include trying to make some extra pieces fit, like the mail I keep getting for Nadifa Mohammed. Is there a Nadifa in my household? What's my relationship to her?

Other relationships are ignored. The Genesis reading places us back into a locus of relationships. With domestic animals and plants we eat, but also with the creepy crawlies and birds and those fearsome sea monsters again from last week. (Being in relationship doesn't necessarily mean we *want* to be in relationship.) We shouldn't have missed our relationship with the sun, since life depends on it. But we also can no longer overlook our relationship with the dome of the sky, as we alter its composition and character in climate change.

For this expanse of relationships, one thing is clear: we're all in 'em. The self-made man of American myth (and the myth is almost always masculine, which should tell us something)? It's a lie. From birth on, none of us is truly independent. Even if you live alone or work alone or are on a deserted island.

Which calls to mind 400-year-old words of John Donne:

*No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every [one] is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,*

*[the land] is the less...
Any [one's] death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in [hu]mankind,
And therefore never send to know
for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.*

That also rings true with Martin Luther King's sentiment in his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

His words have potency echoed in our days, as he continues about protests nearly 60 years ago responding to policing that enforced racial disparity and white power, saying "You deplore the demonstrations that are taking place. But I am sorry you did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being. I am sure each of you would want to go beyond the superficial social analyst who looks merely at effects, and does not grapple with underlying causes." (in *A Testament of Hope*, p290)

Now, I'm grateful that our Madison mayor and many business owners *have* been able to see causes this past week and see that we should be doing something to change the effects. With others who are waking up, I'm personally grateful to understand more, that George Floyd's death diminishes me. We're not unaffected. The bell tolls for all of us.

But I'm not here for feeling self-congratulatory from my easy place. I really want to get on with talking about God, because in the end that's also what matters for our relationships.

So, God is sometimes perceived for being before everything, existing apart from all else, as the single, solo, highest authority—the quite literal monarchy. And we think independence at the top means power and will to dominate. I'll just say it: that's a bad notion.

Next on relationships, this day for the Holy Trinity is often approached as if it's prescriptive doctrine, that councils of bishops got together 1700

years ago to decide and declare what God was going to be. That presumes the Trinity is a human invention.

We'd do better to recognize our theology as the gradual piecing together of going through God's recycling bin of old mail, trying to figure it out from scraps and fragments, with occasional stray bits mixed in that throw us off.

We don't actually have to start our wondering about God with Genesis or the Big Bang. We begin with Jesus. We wonder what it is about God he's trying to help us know, with the biggest question of what dying on the cross means. Jesus talks about his Father and says he'll send the Holy Spirit. What do we do with that? Such detective work to figure how the pieces fit for God and where we fit in, this project carried on for a few centuries after Jesus, and of course continues still.

Today's readings give a couple scraps and fragments prompting this puzzling, as Jesus tells us to baptize and teach "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." And Paul, who would never have read the Gospel of Matthew, somehow still arrived at a similar sense in the final words of his letter referring to our Lord Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit.

We might begin to reflect that God has relationship even with Godself, that there is some sort of divine dance happening.

It does also mean relationship with us. We receive, partly in that we were created, that God loved us into existence, wanted relationship with you, blessed you to be. We receive a role and a commission in creation. We stand in relationship not just to the human community and the rest of creation, but in relationship with God, with Jesus who promises to be with you always.

In these readings of relationship with the Trinity, the core isn't control or domination. Even when Jesus speaks of obedience and authority, it's not how we typically use that as oppressive or dictatorial. Our relating with God and each other is "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit," a foundational phrase, the greeting that sets out how we gather each week. Marily Crews noticed this

week we can boil it down to grace, love, and communion. Relationship.

I really like that observation, which for me takes some unpacking. Grace is connected to the word "gift," and we've already observed that we receive in this relationship from God. Jesus gives to us, gives himself. We could probably understand love as where giving and receiving come together. And communion, like our word "communal," means sharing. Having received from Jesus, we also share. So Paul commends his congregation and commends us in receiving, loving, sharing.

Because it's who God is, Paul expected the church to live with receiving, loving, sharing. We aren't based on old relationships like master and slave (or boss and employee), man and woman, cultural insider vs. outsider, citizen vs. not, rich and poor, skilled and incompetent, able-bodied and unsuccessful, or any gradation that ranks relationship. We are reciprocal in love, receiving and sharing, joining the divine dance.

We know at good moments that that's what happens at church. We can feel that grace, love, and communion embodied around us. It's also hard, then, to be separated from each other, since we lose some of the ultimate godly goodness of these church relationships.

Even though we're still learning this in the church, it's amazing that we have managed to set these expectations for those outside the church, too. Maybe it means we're conveying Jesus' teaching to all peoples, as he commissioned us. We believe every voice should matter and every vote count. We want society to care for the sick and protect the vulnerable. We believe that children are beautiful and vital. We sometimes have trailed in understanding the value and validity of LGBTQ persons, but we've got really good grounding for seeing the image of God in those relationships, too.

And we expect that racial distinctions shouldn't leave anybody out, much less inflict harm. Even as we're still needing practice as church, we have these expectations for society. We believe the whole world should operate with receiving, loving, sharing. Power shouldn't get its way in preserving privilege, as if that could even work.

We are not islands. We are woven into a single garment of mutuality. Sometimes we can stop the bell from tolling. And that shouldn't need to be enforced. We want to recognize and delight in these relationships, just as God does. Because we trust God is so good, so kind, so unstoppably compassionate and inclusive, we go on receiving, loving, sharing.

Yesterday in my inbox I got the poem from President Obama's first inauguration. Here are a few good lines to conclude, and to continue creation and relation:

*Each day we go about our business,
I know there's something better down the road.
We walk into that which we cannot yet see.
Praise song for struggle,
praise song for the day.
What if the mightiest word is love?
Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.
[Today] any thing can be made,
any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,
praise song for walking forward in that light.**

* <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52141/praise-song-for-the-day>