

Life Together
Acts 2:37 – 47; 1 Corinthians 12:4 – 27
May 27, 2018 (Trinity Sunday)

This past Monday I came into the office and got such a great start on today's sermon. I knew it was Trinity Sunday, so we were going to be talking about the Trinity, the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and what that means for us. I had an idea of exactly where we were going, and I had all these notes and thoughts outlined, which *never* happens first thing on a Monday. It's usually not until Tuesday afternoon that I am that far along. So I was feeling pretty good about things.

Then as I was driving to meet someone for lunch, I got a phone call from my uncle telling me that my father had died. And that changed everything. I knew I couldn't preach the same sermon that I was preparing. But at the same time, I didn't know *what* to preach. I didn't even know if I *should* preach. Maybe just take the week off and let it sit for a while. But then you know what I experienced? All these people in the church – all of *you* – reaching out to me, surrounding me with love and hugs and prayers and cards and kind words and offers of help. And I realized, *that's* the Trinity.

The Trinity is not just a *theological idea*. It's a *way of life*. It's not just something to be *studied* or *understood*. It is something to be *embodied* and *lived*. The Trinity is the relationship between *three distinct persons* (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and yet at the same time those three distinct persons are *one*, living together in mutual love. The *very nature of God* is one of *community* – three living together as one. And this is what the Trinity shows us about *ourselves* – that being created in the very image of the triune God, *our* very nature is found in community. We were *created for community*, to live life *together*, as *one*, in mutual love.

We see this at the very beginning of creation. God looks at Adam and says, “It is *not good* that the man should be alone. I will make him a partner.” We were not created to go through life by ourselves. We were created to share life with other people in community.

We see this embodied by the early church in our reading from Acts. It says that when the church first started out, all who believed were together and had all things in common. This is not like *we* say, “Oh, we’ve got a lot in common,” but that they *shared* everything they had. Whatever they had was for the common use. It says they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God together.

They shared their *food*. They shared their *money*. They shared their *time*. They lived life *together*. This wasn’t just a Sunday thing for them. They depended on each other. They opened their lives up to one another. They were inherently connected to each other. Their lives were *bound* together. What affected *one* of them affected *all* of them. They were *many*, living together as *one*.

On Wednesday a poet named John Blase shared a story on social media. He said, “A family man, probably a little younger than me, lives across the street from my parents. He walked over recently and said to my dad, “I know your sons love you very much, but I know they don’t live close. And I know you’re getting older, so I want you to consider me your son. I’ll keep an eye out, but anything you need, anything at all, day or night, don’t hesitate to ask.” He gave my dad

all his contact information, then walked back across the street. My Dad told me that story, and I was undone, thankful for my new brother.”¹

That is a reflection of the Trinity. And that is the *church*. Mothers and fathers finding new sons and daughters, sons and daughters finding new brothers and sisters, all of us living together as one in mutual love, our lives intertwined with each other.

And that is what we see Paul saying to the Christians in Corinth. He says we each have different gifts. Different ways in which we are called to live out our faith and serve God. Some people preach. Some people teach. Some people cook so that other people have food to eat. Some people work really well with kids, while others are like, “That’s not *my* gift!” Some people work well with their *hands*, and they can *build* things, while other people are like, “I don’t know *how* they do *that*!” We each have these different gifts, *but*, Paul says, they are given to us by the *same Spirit*, for the *common good*. Whatever my gift is, it’s not just for *me*. It’s for *all of us*. My *life* is *not just for me*, it is meant to be *shared* and lived in *harmony* with *your* life.

This is what the church is meant to be. A community of people whose *lives* are *bound together*. Inherently connected. Living life together. Sharing our gifts, sharing our *lives* with each other. Laughing together, crying together, praying together. Many distinct people, living together as *one*. The Greek word for *church* is *ekklesia*, which means, “Those who have been called out.” We have been called out of our individual lives, to live a *new life, together*, in Christ.

We are called not just to *go* to church, but to *be* the church. To open ourselves up and let each other in and *share life together*. Share our hopes and our joys. Share our fears and our failures.

¹ <https://twitter.com/johnblase/status/999361698418057216>

When one of us does well, Paul says, we *all* do well. When one of us hurts, we *all* hurt. We are called to be as connected to each other as the Father is to the Son and the Spirit is to the Father and the Son is to the Spirit.

And *that* can be a very hard thing to do. Because when you open yourself up to someone else and live life together like that, you can get hurt. So the question for us is not how we live life together with the people we *love* and get along with. That's fairly easy. The challenge is how we live life together with people who are *different* from us, people with whom we *don't* get along, and people who *hurt* us.

I didn't have a relationship with my father for the last ten years. He struggled for decades with alcoholism and mental illness, and he hurt me in some very deep ways. And there came a point where I said, "This relationship is not healthy, it's not a source of love, it is only *hurting* me, and so for *my* well being and the well being of my *family*, I need to remove myself from this relationship." I know a lot of us have had similar experiences, where we have had to separate ourselves from someone who is hurting us, or they have separated themselves from *us*. And I'll be the first to say that I don't think that's what God *wants*. God certainly doesn't want us to get *hurt*, but God *also* doesn't want us to just *give up* on each other. If our very nature is to be in community, to be in relationship with each other, and God has put us together in life with this other person, then what does it mean for us to *walk away* from that? It's like Paul says, "God has arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as God chose," and one member can't just say to another, "I don't need you."

I think that God calls us to do the hard work of working it out. God wants us to do *everything we can* to make it work. Jesus says that if someone sins against you, if someone hurts you, you

should forgive them, not just *seven* times, but seventy *times* seven. So one of the ways that we are called to live life together is by practicing forgiveness – extending it and seeking it. Forgiveness doesn't mean that things go back to the way they were before. Forgiveness is about us being able to *let go* of what this other person has done and the hurt they have caused us; not to keep dwelling on it or holding it against them or punishing them for it anymore. But to *let it go* and *move on*. Sometimes we can move on *with* them, and sometimes we *can't*. Reconciliation is a two-way street. *Both* parties have to be willing to change, and you can't *make* someone else do that. Forgiveness is about the ways that *I* am willing to change – to let go of anger or pain and open myself up to love.

I believe that reconciliation is always the *goal* of forgiveness. That that's what God ultimately *wants* for us – to be reconciled and have a *whole* relationship with this other person. But sometimes that doesn't happen in this life. What we trust in, though, is that God's power, God's healing and love, extends *beyond* this world and this life, so that what can't be reconciled in *this* life might be reconciled in the life to come.

Tony Earley is an author who, in writing about the time some friends asked him to be the godfather to their daughter Jessie, says this:

“While I am touched by her parents' faith in me, I feel particularly unqualified for the job. I [am] an angry, resentful, unforgiving [person]. The sad truth is that I do not like Christians very much, particularly when they congregate. I think that whenever two or three people gather in God's name, it's only a matter of time until they start trouble. I've found the churches I've attended to be filled with people who are as ill-tempered, hypocritical, judgmental, and divisive as I am, and I'm invariably as disappointed in them as I am in myself.

“And now I am about to be...charged with leading a child into the faith, which proves, if nothing else, that God has a sense of humor. Jessie is a beautiful child, five months old, who beams at the world as it passes. She knows nothing but good in the world, and I spend a lot of time wondering about what I should tell her. I suppose I should tell her first that I believe. I still doubt most everything, including the motives of all organized religions...but I do believe that I am watched over by a God who loves me, who kept me alive, for reasons known only to him, all the years I wanted to die. I will tell her I have no idea what God wants me to do, only that every time I arrive at a desperate place, usually of my own devising, a path opens up in front of me, whether I have prayed for a path or not.

“When Jessie is old enough I will tell her about the dark places I have been, the ways I hurt myself and other people because I was angry. I will tell her that there are people out there who will love her and people who will hurt her, [and] that sometimes they will be the same person. I will also tell her that I rarely find the strength to forgive the people who hurt me, that I nurse and enjoy a multitude of small hatreds, and that I am ashamed for it.

“Jessie lives in the mountains in Tennessee, and I like to think we’ll walk along the ridges near her house, and I will show her poison oak, and tell her how in our part of the world the leaves of all the poisonous plants grow in groups of three; I will tell her that in our part of the world all the poisonous snakes have triangular-shaped heads. I will tell her that these things are miracles, at once reminders that we live in a fallen world, and proof of God’s great love. I will tell her that as we walk through the world, even along the dangerous paths we have chosen for ourselves, God worries about where we put our feet.”²

² Tony Earley, “A Worn Path” from *Somehow Form a Family*, pg. 124 – 126.

God calls us to live life together – broken people with other broken people, in a fallen world – bearing witness as best we can to the triune nature of God, in hope that, together, we might find a way to be whole.