

All Saints

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon for Trinity Sunday
Rev. Jonathan Stepp
June 7, 2020

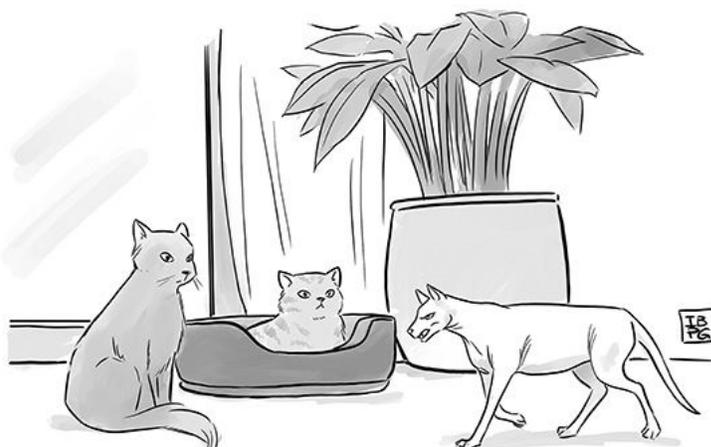
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I realize that being stuck at home on Sunday mornings is wearing thin for all of us, but one bright spot is that we get to see cartoons like these from professional humorists instead of hearing a joke from an amateur like me.

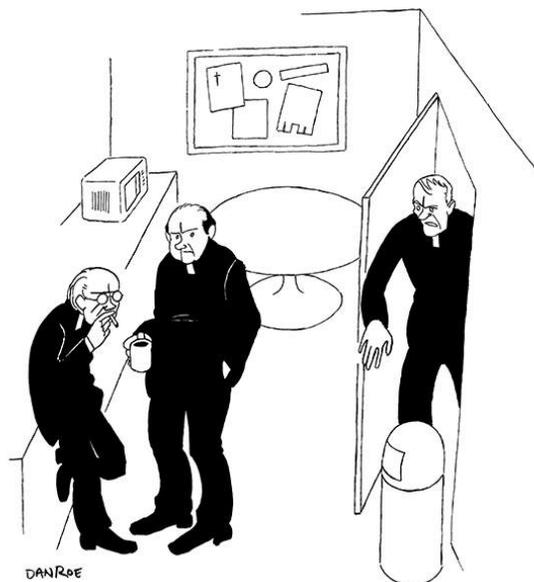


“Let me just check my e-mail, my texts, my missed calls, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, my credit score, my horoscope, the results of this latest personality test, the S. & P., the Dow, the news, this article about cute dogs, and the weather, and then we can go.”

I especially like this one to the right because today is Trinity Sunday. In the worship calendar of the Church, Trinity Sunday marks a significant transition point. For the last six months, since the beginning of Advent back in December, we have been telling the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. It is the gospel story and we celebrate it by remembering his birth, his baptism, his struggle against evil, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his ascension.



“Yeah, I tried cutting my own hair.”



“Back to work, boys. Those mysteries of the Trinity aren’t going to grapple with themselves.”

To understand why the gospel story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection concludes with a celebration of the Trinity, I think it is helpful to think about why God became human as the man Jesus Christ. I love the way our Catechism very simply and succinctly summarizes this. It says "The divine Son became human, so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God . . ." [*The Book of Common Prayer*, pg. 850] The whole point of the story that we have been telling for the last six months, from Christmas to Ascension Day, is that through Christ we have been adopted into the life of God.

Since Jesus reveals to us that God is Triune as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our adoption into the life of God means that our existence is revealed to be an existence in which we live and move and have our being within the loving relationship of God's own life as Trinity. Jesus reveals to us that loving community is not just something that God does, loving community is something that God is – and now, through Christ, all of humanity is included within that loving community of God's own life.

This icon is probably the most famous depiction of the Trinity. It is by a late medieval artist named Andrei Rublev.



From left to right we see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit depicted at a Eucharistic table and the Son is in the center because from our human perspective it is the life of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, that reveals to us the other two persons of God. In this iconography the Son is clothed in a blue outer garment to depict the fact that he has taken on human nature.

Some years ago, as I meditated on this icon and considered the Christian gospel which tells us that we have been adopted into the life of the Trinity through Christ, I began to believe that this imagery of the Trinity was missing something: it is missing us.

So, I asked a good friend of mine, a graphic artist in Nashville, TN, named Stephen Leaver, to create an updated version of this icon that would attempt to depict our adoption into God's life. I described to him what I envisioned and he created it just as I hoped he would.



Here, in this icon of the Trinity, we see, as in Rublev's icon, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are pictured from left to right at a table spread with a great feast – the kind of heavenly feast foreshadowed by the Eucharistic feast. The Son is also in the center, but in an updated version of the iconography he wears a hat and a t-shirt to depict the fact that he has taken on human nature. And now a fourth figure has been added – a young boy, seated in the very midst of the loving community of God's Triune life. The gospel of Jesus Christ is that we are, all of us, that boy. (Of course, you may recognize the person who was our model in this case – that's Lewis at age 5.)

What does this picture of the gospel message tell us? Allow me to quote the great 20th century theologian Karl Barth. He said, “on the basis of the eternal will of God we have to think of every human being . . . as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father; and we have to deal with him on this assumption.” [*The Humanity of God*, p. 53. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.]

I have devoted my life to being a minister of the gospel and of the sacraments because I believe that this truth of humanity's adoption into the loving community of the Triune life is the message of good news that can change lives and change the world.

We need look no farther than the tragic events that have enveloped our nation in the last couple of weeks to see how this might be so. When we see the images of George Floyd being killed, we are seeing a child of God, included in the life of the Trinity, being murdered. It horrifies us because it is a violation of the very moral fabric of the universe – a moral fabric that was woven on the loom of the Triune life of God.

And the values, morals, and traditions of our nation have their source in that same moral fabric. Because we believe that all people are included in God's life, we believe that a human being cannot be punished, and certainly cannot be executed, without being convicted in a fair trial by a jury of his peers. George Floyd received no trial. Because we believe that all people are included in God's life, we believe that a human being must be presumed innocent right up until the moment of conviction. Therefore, according to both morality and the law of our nation, George Floyd was an innocent man who was unjustly executed.

Sometimes, when these tragic issues arise, people will say that the Church should not comment on them because the Church should stay out of politics. The murder of George Floyd is not a political matter. It is a matter of morality, a matter of right and wrong, and a matter of the spirituality of humanity's inclusion in God's life. This trick of avoiding tough moral issues by hiding behind the screen of politics is an old one in our society. If you go back to the 19th century you can find people saying that the Church shouldn't talk about slavery because that's politics. If you go back to the 1960s you can find people saying that the Church shouldn't talk about civil rights because that's politics. Those were not political issues, they were moral issues, and so is the murder of George Floyd and the excessive use of force by law enforcement. These are moral issues and the Church is called by God to comment on them.

Of course, we all recognize that the destruction of private property in riots is not a helpful commentary on a moral issue. But as soon as we, as a society, recoil from destructive protests we immediately find ourselves facing another moral issue. Because many of the same voices that are now condemning destructive protest and calling for more violence to be perpetrated against more people, are the same voices who criticized and condemned those who peacefully protested – such as Colin Kapernick, who peacefully and respectfully knelt during the national anthem to protest these sorts of excessive uses of force.

The question that I believe God is asking American society is this: if we wouldn't listen when our brothers and sisters in Christ protested peacefully, and we won't listen now that they are protesting destructively, then when will we listen? When will we hear the gospel, believe that we are all included in the Triune life of God, and treat our brothers and sisters with love instead of violence?

Trinity Sunday teaches us that loving community is not just something that God does, loving community is something that God *is*. And not only is God loving community, the gospel teaches us that the loving community of God's life includes each and every one of us. That truth changed the world when the earliest disciples spread out from Jerusalem, to Corinth, to Rome, and turned the Roman Empire upside down. That truth changed the world when abolitionists brought an end to slavery and the civil rights movement brought an end to segregation. That truth has changed the world before and it can change the world again, if we will allow it do so.

May God Almighty, the blessed and holy Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, give us the ears to listen, the eyes to see, and the heart to believe that we are all within the life of God and may our Savior Jesus Christ give us the strength to act accordingly.

Amen.