



Sermon for Trinity Sunday
Rev. Jonathan Stepp
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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

An Irish farmer and an English farmer are standing on either side of a stone wall that separates their fields, arguing about politics. Suddenly a chicken comes walking along the top of the wall and lays an egg. The English farmer says “it’s mine because the chicken is mine” while the Irish farmer says “it’s mine because the chicken laid it on my side of the wall.” This argument goes on forever until finally the Irishman says “I’ll tell you what, let’s have a tough man contest to see who’s the toughest. Whoever wins gets the egg.” The Englishman agrees and the Irish farmer says “I tell you what – we’ll each take it in turn to punch the other in the stomach as hard as we can and whoever takes the punch the best will win. I’ll go first”

So the Irishman rears back with all his strength and punches his neighbor so hard in the stomach that it knocks all the air out of him, he doubles over in agony, and then staggers around trying to catch his breath for five minutes. Finally he’s able to stand back up and he says “that was no punch, I’ll show you what a real punch feels like.”

And the Irishman says, “You’re right, it’s only an egg. Keep it.”

Arguments are a common occurrence in life but they don’t always go the way we expect them to, do they? I’m going to come back to some thoughts on arguing in a moment – thoughts about silly arguments like the one in the joke and thoughts about serious arguments. But before I talk more about arguments I want to set our thinking about disagreement in the context of where we are in the Christian year of worship: today is Trinity Sunday.

Trinity Sunday marks the conclusion of a six month cycle of worship that we enact every year in order to tell the story of Jesus and the good news about his life. The story begins in December with Advent, as we hear the prophecies of God’s plan to bring humanity home to himself. At Christmas and Epiphany we celebrate the descent of the Son to make his home with us and during Lent and Holy Week we remember the suffering he

experienced as a result of that descent into our sin and death. Easter and Ascension remind us of his ascent back to his Father and they share with us the good news that we have been raised up with him through our baptism into his death and resurrection. And then comes Pentecost, as the risen and ascended Christ pours out the Holy Spirit on humanity so that, as he says in today's gospel, "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

And that brings us to Trinity Sunday. In a way, everything we've been reading and celebrating through these six months has been leading up to this day because everything we've celebrate has led to this moment of revelation. This moment when it is revealed to us that community is not just something God creates, community is something that God is. Love is not just something that God gives to us, love is something that God is.

Prior to the descent of the Son into humanity as the man Jesus Christ and prior to his ascension, risen in glory, back to God, we did not know that God was Triune. Humanity had two basic visions of God prior to Jesus. One was the vision held by the Hebrews and the best of the Greek Philosophers, like Aristotle and Plato, that said God is a solitary and isolated being. What the Greeks called the "unmoved mover" and the "undivided monad." The other vision was that of paganism – that there are many gods, each going about their own pet projects, sometimes cooperating and sometimes fighting.

Then Jesus came. Jesus spoke to us with an authority, grace, and faithfulness that revealed him to be God in the flesh and he spoke of having come from God being one with God. Jesus spoke us of God, not as an irritable thrower of lightening bolts or a far away monad, but as a loving Father who sent his Son into the world to reveal God's true nature to us. And, as we hear in today's gospel, Jesus promised to send the very Holy Spirit of God to us from the Father so that our knowledge of God's true nature could keep growing until we are at last all brought home to him.

It was this revelation of God in Jesus Christ that opened the truth to us that community is not just something God creates, community is something that God is. God is the community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And love is not just something that God gives to us, love is something that God is. God is the love of the Father for the beloved Son, and the love of the Son for the Father, communicated in the Holy Spirit. Christ reveals to us that before humanity, the earth, the stars, or anything else existed, there was perfect, loving community in the love and communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit. And the good news message of Christ is that we were all created to live in communion with that loving community for eternity.

That is why Christ was born in Bethlehem, baptized in the Jordan, crucified at Jerusalem, raised from the empty tomb, and ascended from the Mt. of Olives. So that the communion and love of the Trinity could be opened up and all of us could be adopted through him into that life of community and love.

It's in that context then – the context that Christ has brought us into the Triune life of God – that I want to finish by circling back to the issue of arguments. Since we are the adopted children of the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, it means that our community – which we call the church – must learn to communicate, and, yes, even to argue, in a way that reflects the loving community of God's Triune life as revealed to us by God the Holy Spirit.

What I'm referring to here is what psychologists and counselors sometimes refer to as "fighting fairly" It is only natural that we as human beings will have disagreements and need to be able to talk them through. Since we are created in the image of God, who is loving community, it is also only natural that we must learn to disagree and talk through our disagreements in a way that is loving and preserves our church community. In other words, our adoption into the life of the Trinity means that we must learn to "fight fairly."

Not only is this relevant, I think, because today is Trinity Sunday but it is also important because we're just a few weeks away from our biggest event of the year: the Sweet Corn Festival. Big events like this are just naturally stressful, they raise the general anxiety level in the parish, and if we aren't careful events like this can provoke us into arguments and traps of miscommunication that look more like the two farmers in the joke and less like the Trinity revealed in Christ.

So, I will finish with a few pointers on how to fight fairly. None of this will be new to you but I want to remind you of what disagreement looks like when we are a part of loving community so that we can remember that we belong to Christ and try to act like it.

1. Listen first and then speak. Don't just listen in a way where you're waiting your turn speak but listen with an open heart to try to understand.

2. Speak the truth in love. That's right out of the Bible, the book of Ephesians. You are entitled to your feelings and opinions and it is okay to express them honestly – but remember to only speak if you can express your thoughts and feelings in a way that is kind, loving, and respectful.

3. Address the present, not the past. It's natural that certain circumstances dredge up old memories and feelings about past experiences we've had with each other, but when we're fighting fairly we talk about what's happening here and now not what happened way back when.

4. Look for the creative solution. It's surprising how often we can find a compromise that we can all like, or at least live with, if we are creative about new ideas and new ways of doing things.

5. Assume good will. This is sometimes a hard one for me – it's all too easy to assume that the other person is speaking or acting out of a negative or disruptive motivation. Start by assuming that the other person has good intentions and is trying to do what is right. If that turns out to not be true you can deal with it at that point.

6. Finally: forgive. July in the south is hot and humid. The corn festival is hard work. We're just not always all going to be in the best frame of mind or on our best behavior. As God has forgiven us in Christ so we are called to forgive one another.

The good news of this Trinity Sunday is that we are not on our own to build loving community. Through Christ we are already included in the ultimate life of loving community, and the Holy Spirit is sharing with us God's life of love and communion. As we work together as a parish I pray that we will each center our hearts and minds on who God is, who we are in Christ, and how we can each do our part to live into our identity as beloved and loving children of the Father.

Amen.