

The Trinity and Me

John 14: 15-21

Most reputable scholars think the author of the Gospel according to John was not the disciple John or anyone else who actually was with the historical Jesus. This is largely due to the very late date at which it was actually written. There is speculation, however, that the gospel might well represent a separate tradition of teaching that goes back to Jesus. Fully half its total number of pages are devoted to the last day of Jesus' life. There is an extended time in the upper room for the Last Supper, but surprisingly there is no mention of the broken bread and shared cup. Instead, Jesus broke open his heart and mind with private teachings for his disciples. He poured out his thoughts and insights for them.

In this upper room teaching, Jesus told the disciples, "If you love me, keep my commandments and I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth." This is an early suggestion of the idea that God, though One, is community. Later, this concept would be expanded into the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus is in the Father. The Father is in Jesus and the Father gives the Spirit to continue Jesus' work of guiding and helping the followers of Jesus.

The key statement in this is the first one in which Jesus tells the disciples – all of us, to "Keep my commandments as the way to show your love for me." God will show love for you by giving you the Spirit as the bond of that love. The Spirit will be your advocate, your comforter, and your friend. The Spirit will teach you and give you insight into the mind of God. Essentially, the Spirit is Christ with us, Jesus' continuing and abiding presence with each of us.

God is One, unity. This trinity idea is not an attempt to divide God up into three, or more, personalities. It is symbolic language to describe the first disciples' experiences of the holy as a result of their experience of Jesus. Thinking of God as trinity is only part of what this passage can teach us. The other part is *us* – you and me. That's why the name of this sermon is, *The Trinity and Me*. We are part of the holy community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus was the key for us. In his life, as retold in the Gospels, we see God with a human face. The Spirit is a way we can talk about Jesus' presence being with us in us continuing way.

So, what does it mean for us that we are part of the community that includes God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? What are the implications of our being in that holy community? How many of you are part of a family – either your biological family or a family of your own making? What are the implications of your being part of that community, that family? There are bound to be expectations of participation – showing up for family gatherings or participating in things your family does. You're probably expected to fulfill a role in your family. Yours may be a pleasant and positive role or may be just the opposite. It's even possible the role you play is to avoid family gatherings or to complain about other family members! But in a family, whatever kind of family you belong to, each of you are part of each other.

Not everyone feels like part of a family. And all of us are prone to feeling lonely or isolated at times. Some people feel that way most of the time. Human loneliness is that sense of isolation and feeling cut off from God and others. But if we are part of the divine community, how can we be cut off? The answer is that we are not ever cut off from the community of God, but it is possible for us to live out of touch with that community. It is quite possible for us to live in isolation from the community around us. Why should we ever live that way? Why do any of us ever live out of touch with love and acceptance?

Answers to why we live out of touch are probably as many, varied, and individual as the people answering. They include our early experiences of family were not as accepting and loving as we might have hoped. It's possible that the families in which we grew up gave us the message that we were not acceptable or that love was a conditional gift. Even churches, where we look for an expression of the divine community, can judge and reject us.

Churches reflect the people in them while also reflecting that presence of the divine. The key phrase in Jesus' teaching is, "If you love me, keep my commandments." What commandments did Jesus give in John's Gospel? The one that stands out for me is this, "that we love one another as Jesus has loved us." (John 15: 12) Love is the standard of the followers of Jesus – that we love others as Jesus loved, to the point of laying down our lives for each other.

A religious order founded in the seventeenth century, which at one time flourished, with many houses all over the country, had shrunk to five elderly monks occupying a cavernous house in acres of grounds. For many years they had had no enquiries from people wanting to join the order. They were downhearted and turned in on themselves.

One day they had a request from a local rabbi. Could he be allowed the occasional use of any empty cottage situated in their woodland grounds for periods of quiet and retreat? They gladly agreed, pleased to be asked.

Some weeks later, when the rabbi was using the cottage, the abbot made a courtesy call to see that everything was all right for him. They got talking, and found they had quite a lot in common in bemoaning the lack of religious commitment these days. The abbot asked the rabbi if he had any advice to offer about how to rekindle the life of his community. The rabbi said he wished he knew. All he could say was, "One of your community members is the Messiah." The abbot thought to himself, "Well I never! Rabbis are renowned for their pithy sayings, but this one is surely a little over the top."

Back at the monastery in the recreation time that evening, the other monks wanted to know how the conversation had gone. The abbot told them what the rabbi had said. They looked at one another in astonishment for a second or two before bursting out laughing, "What a stupid idea! He must be off his trolley."

But, ridiculous though it sounded, the thought somehow kept coming back to each of them as they went about their activities in the days that followed. Could he mean the abbot? He's certainly been abbot for a long time and he is a fair-minded man; but he isn't exactly one to set the world on fire. Perhaps he'd meant Brother Henry. Henry is quite a holy man. Everyone knows that, though he is a bit dull. Could he be the one? It couldn't be Brother William. He always stirs up trouble by speaking his mind. But you have to admit he often says things that need saying. He certainly couldn't have meant Brother Aidan. He is a real doormat, a non-entity if ever there was one, though he does seem to have a knack of being there when you need him. He just seems to appear at the right moment. Of course, the rabbi couldn't have meant me. I'm nothing special. Really, I'm just an ordinary person. Oh God, not me! You couldn't ask that of me, could you?

As each of them turned these thoughts over in their minds, they began to treat each other with a great deal more respect, on the off-chance that one of them might be the Messiah. Their appreciation and expectations of each other began to grow.

The beautiful grounds in which the monastery was set had always been used occasionally by picnickers and walkers, but these casual visitors began to be aware of a different feel about the place. They began to visit the house itself and the chapel, curious to know more. After a time, there came the occasional enquiry about the order itself and how one might join. Within a year, two postulants had joined the order. In the years that followed, the community began to thrive and once again became a center of light and spiritual power. (as told by Francis Dewar in *Invitations*)

Ultimately, what Jesus was teaching his disciples in that upper room in John's Gospel was the nature of God and the truth about life. God is in each of us as we are each in God. In that divine community, we each reflect something of God because God lives through us. You are Jesus to me. I am Jesus to you. The key to this is love – not so much love as a feeling, but love as the way we treat others and love as the way we act in all phases of our lives.

Love is the way we know God. It is how we see Christ in each other and the way we are Christ to each. Love is the power that alone can transform the world. Love is the path we walk on the journey of our lives. It is why we gather each Sunday and it is why and how we extend the hand of welcome for you to walk with us and we can walk together in Jesus' name.