

Sermon for Trinity Sunday 2014 "Get Up and Dance"

This Sunday, the Sunday after Pentecost, is traditionally designated as Trinity Sunday, mostly because Jesus uses the Trinitarian formula of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" in his final commission to the disciples.

And so each year, when this Sunday comes around, preachers quake in their boots, because the concept of the Trinity is, well, hard to wrap our brains around.

If we find it difficult, we are not alone. A number of heresies of the early church were based upon somebody trying to come up with a clever way to understand the Trinity. Three persons, one God. Equal. Eternal. No one person dominates. They don't take turns being the boss. They are always there, always one, always equal.

You can see how you'd get into trouble, because there is no perfect earthly metaphor for the Trinity. Yes, St. Patrick tried it with the shamrock. Augustine tried it with the concept of love. But none of those metaphors really capture it.

So humans come up with other ideas, like the three persons have different jobs (creator, redeemer, sustainer). Or that God the Father is the Old Testament God, Jesus Christ is the New Testament God, and the Holy Spirit is the present day God. Or that there is one God, and sometimes God is acting as Father, sometimes, Son and sometimes Holy Spirit. Or that God the Father was around first, all alone, and then Jesus came God's son, and then Jesus left us the Holy Spirit to keep us on course. All of these have been named as heresies, or false teachings. What we are told is the right belief is that there is one God, that there are three persons in this one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and this Three-in-One has always been and will always be. Makes my head hurt when I try to understand it.

But our friends the Christians in the Eastern Orthodox tradition take a different route in talking about the Trinity, and I think it is a more helpful and accurate way of understanding, one that is reinforced by our readings from Holy Scripture today.

There's a Greek word that the Orthodox folks use to describe the Trinity: "perichoresis." It can be translated as a swirling around, or intertwining, one in and out of the other, and you can even use very technical language like "circuminsession," which is not the least bit helpful and even sounds a wee bit medical.

But here's another way of translating it that we can really grab onto: *Perichoresis* is dancing around together.

Dancing around together.

Here's a story about dancing together. Several years ago, Doug and I took ballroom dancing lessons. It's a very short story, because we were not very good, and we quit after the first set of lessons. We were trying to follow all the instructions, so we were busily counting steps and holding our bodies fairly rigidly, and trying to remember which direction we were supposed to go. Now this is the man I was married to. We know each other's bodies pretty well. But you would have thought, seeing us dance together, that we were strangers, that our bodies didn't know each other, that we were working to keep ourselves from touching each other except in the prescribed way our teacher taught us. It wasn't very fun. We weren't very good. Doing ballroom dancing clearly was not something we were going to be able to accomplish.

Now fast-forward to a couple of years ago, when the two of us went to Ireland. One night there was a little mini-ceili – a dance and music party – in a tiny, smoky cottage on Galway Bay. The musicians were playing like madmen, and we were all dancing around. It was too small to really move more than a few inches in every direction, but we were all sort of hopping joyfully in place. Sometimes it looked like a polka, sometimes a two-step, sometimes more like an epileptic seizure, but it was all okay. Occasionally one or the other of us would go outside, some even dancing out of the cottage door and onto the grass, but mostly we were swirling in that room, an interconnected mass of laughter and music and joy. A very different kind of dancing, one that superseded any rules about dancing – hold your arms this way, move in this direction, one two three one two three, now turn – a kind of dancing that was endlessly variable, surprising, energetic, joyful.

Two very different experiences of dancing. One rigid, slightly scary, rule-bound, difficult in terms of relationship and interaction. The second wild, free, ever-changing and creative, intermingling, inter-relating, fun.

One of these is *perichoresis* – that swirling about in relationship between the three persons of the one God – and one is not. Which one to you think it is?

If you guessed the second one, you'd be right. That dance of relationship between the three persons of the Trinity is not a strictly defined ballroom tango, where every movement is preordained. It is infinitely variable, and it is about relationship. Relationship between the persons of the One God like the relationship between our happy band of pilgrims in that Irish cottage, where forty were dancing in a room that should have only accommodated ten, where a new step, a new way of dancing, occurred on the fly and might never be repeated, where all of us felt bound together by camaraderie, shared experience, and love.

The important part of understanding the Trinity is not the theological mechanics of how it works...it is not about which person of the trinity does what or when...it is about the relationship in the dance. Because when you understand that the Trinity is about the dance of God, you also understand that you are always invited to be a part of the dance of God, no matter how bad a dancer you think you are.

It is as Paul says in the final words of his epistle to the Corinthians: "live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you." Those are words of relationship, not a rule book. Those are not instructions about what foot to put where, they are about dancing with God and with each other, knowing God loves each of us. Those are not orders to follow the models of other dancers in other times and places, they are encouragement to enter into the dance of intertwining with each other in the same creative and unique way we have been made and have lived into ourselves.

Think less about the rules and get up and dance. Don't worry if you're doing it right. Just get up and dance, as the three persons of the one God are entwined in the dance. Just get up and dance, and feel all that is God – more than we can understand, more than we can imagine – applauding your dance, even as God enters into your dance as your partner and beloved and friend.

Get up and dance.

Amen.