TRINITY SUNDAY

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

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June 12, 2022

*“Within Reach”* Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; John 16:12-15

We are now in the middle of the church year. I tell you this in an effort to explain this Sunday, which has become known to us as “Trinity Sunday.”

For the first half of the church year, which started on the First Sunday of Advent (last year in November), we began to live through the story of Jesus and his coming into the world. We concerned ourselves all of the newness of a baby and with his birth in a stable. We celebrated with wonder and thanks that this was an event given—not to kings and wealth, not to empire and material domination. His birth was given to ordinary people—even to poor people, common people—people like us.

After Advent, our journey with Jesus took us into small villages, farmers’ markets, through wheat fields, and into small, local synagogues. We have sat at table with him and tasted the best wine anyone has ever known. With Christ and the disciples, we have encountered multitudes, which were hungry, and we watched and marveled as Jesus fed them with provisions that were barely more than enough to feed a small family.

During this first half of the church year, we have also stood by nervously while he drew close to people that others avoided and shunned. These were the outcasts: the sinners, and the others with diseases and demons. Secretly, we dreaded being found in such company for fear that we, too, would be labeled an outcast. But even before we could admit what we were secretly thinking, Jesus’ desire for the wholeness and health of those broken ones filled their bodies with new life. The social outcasts were lifted-up and given back their dignity, the sick were healed and made well.

His love prevailed over all obstacles. Finally, even a tomb could not hold back his desire to show us God’s love. If anything, it increased our understanding of the power of love in general, and God’s love in particular.

But now we have come to a real crossroads.

Since Easter, we have known the day would come when the familiar way of relating to God-in-the-flesh through Jesus would be replaced with God’s presence in our lives through the work of the Spirit. This is what we celebrated last Sunday—the Spirit’s presence, but especially, the Spirit’s *indwelling* in our lives.

In so doing, we also acknowledged that our relationship with Jesus has changed. He is still with us—he is *within* us…but this *is* a change, and I believe it is important to recognize this and come to terms with it.

I am tempted, at this point, to pause and give us all a chance to reflect on the many changes we have been through in our lives—many changes, many of them have been losses. The past two years. The past two *months*. I would like us pause now, together, but it is important to go on and instead, but now I will describe one of my own pauses that I have experienced here and there…

Since I came back to live here in Honolulu two years ago, I have occasionally found myself driving through some of the old neighborhoods I knew as a child. Many of the same buildings are still there. I have paused at a few of them to watch the people I knew as they did the mundane things of life; as they hung their laundry, as they climbed the steps to their apartments, or tended their gardens they way they had forty-five and fifty years ago.

They have, of course, all passed on from this life. What I saw of them was what I conjured in my mind’s eye. That is: I gave license to my feelings about the passing of time, and had summoned back the feelings of that time and place—that particular season in my life, and the way in which I lived in the world in those earlier years. I allowed myself to occupy those moments with the fullness of hoped-for dreams and aspirations that crowded close around me.

This is something I believe is familiar to all of us. We allow these interludes but then…we return (as we must) to *this* season of our life—often, with a deep breath, a sigh. Some of us require more than a few moments to shake off the cobwebs, and the weight of all those memories.

However, for some of us, this can be a helpful way of refocusing on what is before us, and these interludes can actually inspire us and renew our hope…and our love for life, even as it deepens our connection with all of the ones who have gone before us.

Indeed, it is at this point that the doctrine of the Trinity can begin to make sense. It is at this point that it intersects with us with a deep desire to impart its message of—not only comfort—(but) *connection*.

Yes, the concept of the Trinity is a “doctrine,” which is to say it is a construction of the church. However, it is not something made-up out of some kind of theological fiat. Rather, I believe our notion and our celebration of the Trinity is based on what the early church had experienced directly with Christ.

What the doctrine of the Trinity acknowledges is the *communion* of God the Son, God the Father/Mother, and God the Spirit. The Trinity is a way of describing the unity that God demonstrates within God’s own self, and it also describes the way in which we may *maintain* our place in that close and loving relationship. Please notice that I did *not* say that we entered into their communion. We have always had a place within their unity.

That is why, in the Gospel of John, the gospel writer takes particular pains to describe the way in which Jesus and God are one, and how *we* are one with them. As Jesus will say to the disciples in a few more verses: *As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, … so that they may be one, as we are one, 23I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one.* [17:21,23]

Moreover, the Spirit we have been given is more than the Spirit in and of itself. The Holy Spirit is our *connection* with God our Father/Mother, and God the Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity is what the early church had learned from Christ. It was their way of declaring their trust, of saying that they had taken him at his Word. They had trusted his Word that we would never be left alone, would never have to make our way in the world alone. Holy Parent, Holy Child, and Holy Spirit are always going to be within reach.

And the Spirit that is indwelling—in each of us *and* in all of us together. This is the epitome of God’s truth: that the Spirit is dwelling within and among us, and this truth is presented to us through the community which is the Trinity—or as I (and theologian, Jurgen Moltmann) like to call them, The Holy Community.

This Holy Community is what the early church experienced and gathered around—Christ’s love which caused him to acknowledge the pain that was to come, but it also caused him to make us a promise of eternal communion with the Holy Community. Indeed, this Community not only connects itself to us, it connects us to one another, and with all who have known the love and grace of God. Which is why Jesus says to the disciples:

*“I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you.* [v.7] and *“so you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”* [v.22]

The truth he shared, the Spirit he sent, is the Spirit of Truth about the community of God.

First and foremost, it is the truth about being in communion with God—being united to God. Because God is intent on covering us with grace, we are guaranteed that God will never fall out of love with us. Instead, the Holy Community will hold us all within their embrace. Through the Spirit we are joined to the Holy Community. And where they are there is grace and love, which means there is reconciliation, there is freedom, there is hope and a future.

I think this is why these two lectionary readings were put together. It is because it is precisely wisdom that we need to make the connections between ourselves and the Holy Community. It is Wisdom—borne of the experience of knowing Christ and believing in his promise—puts all changes in our lives into context. When seen and experienced from the vantage point of a love that is eternal, we are able to find real and lasting comfort—no matter what happens—because we know that our connection to God and each other will never be destroyed. We will never be alone to face the future.

So, this is my prayer for us. I pray we will hear and realize that our comfort is within reach. Life and hope are within reach because the promises of God are good and everlasting. On this Trinity Sunday, and always, I pray we will receive this truth and be made whole by it. May this be so. Amen.