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Abington Presbyterian Church

June 11, 2017

Trinity Sunday

Psalm 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

A BLESSED EMBRACE

In the first few centuries of its history, the church wrestled with some major decisions about doctrine. Someone would write and present a treatise to a gathered council of church officials and there would be long and sometimes heated debates about what was heretical and what fell within acceptable parameters of Christian belief. Long before there was Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, The Rock, or the current crop of WWE wrestlers whose names I don't know, there were certain theologians and bishops whose approach to their counterparts took on the attitude similar to: "Let's get ready to rumble!" Somewhat like the bizarre world of televised wrestling, in this church exercising certain holds and moves, there were heroes and villains and even those who got tossed from the ring through excommunication. The development of the doctrine of the Trinity was chief among the struggles.

Ever since those early theological wrestling matches took place, with just about the same intensity, ministers have wrestled with how to describe the mystery of the Trinity of personae who make up the Unity of Being, realizing that no terminology is fully adequate for the task. When I have tried to pin down the Trinity, the difficulty of the undertaking, matched with my limited descriptive abilities have generally left me feeling like I am the one flat on my back, pinned and defeated. God has been revealed to us in three different ways: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church has called each of these ways 'persons,' not to differentiate them as individual gods, but to identify them as the three different ways God's self is revealed to us, as well as the ways the three are related to one another within the unity of God's being. Just saying that much, I feel like I'm halfway pinned already.

So, in an effort to stay away from the linguistic contortions that are required in technical descriptions of the Godhead, I'd rather focus this morning on what I find to be more inspiring about Trinitarian ideas. There is a richness open to us that beckons you and me to move beyond our monolithic tendencies to latch onto just one piece of what we believe about God that results in us missing the fullness and majesty that is beyond our chosen slice of divine truth. Some people focus on God as revealed through the created order and miss the revealed wonder of Jesus Christ. Others are solely enamored with Christology so that the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit gets ignored. There are groups whose celebrations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit seem to leave little room for logic or reason. In part, our wrestling with the balance of the Trinity can be a reminder to us that there is always more to God than we can hold in our current understanding or focus. That does not mean that our beliefs and enthusiasms are wrong – it is just that we need something to be telling us that the fullness of God is far beyond what we can grasp and there is something more of God that is always reaching out to us.

The old Greek mythologies describe deities who were jealous rivals who often fought with one another. But we have a God who is positively relational down to the divine core. As Theology Professor Shirley Guthrie would say, the Trinitarian “God is the divine community who lives with and for and in each other in mutual openness, freedom, and self-giving love.”¹ The ideas of such balance and relationship have led some to begin to use dance imagery in describing the Trinity. God is in divine community and needs no one else for the divine dance. However, the richness of God's communal nature spills over into the majestic relationship with creation, and in particular in relationship with humanity, as those who are created in God's image. Our God chooses to create and to relate to others, inviting you and me into a blessed and joyful embrace of a God on the move. Have you ever thought of yourselves as God's dance partners?

Back when the flash mob craze was just starting, the Lawrence Hills went to a family wedding where a flash mob was secretly planned for the reception. A

flash mob is normally a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place to perform some kind of organized act for a brief time in order to entertain whoever is around, or more frequently to post it on youtube or Facebook and share it with the online world. The suggestion was that everyone who was going to be attending the wedding reception was to watch and rehearse with a youtube video that had ten dance moves that would go with the Black-Eyed Peas song, "I Gotta Feelin." Then when the DJ would play that song, the whole crowd would without announcement go into the dance routine and the bride and groom would stand in amazement at the coordination of it all. It actually turned out better than I had feared. There were those of us within the family who had wanted to settle for just doing the hokey pokey. But if you have ever seen videos of a large crowd doing a coordinated dance, then I believe you can begin to get a sense of the relational beauty, balance, and movement of the Trinity that inspires others of us to join in. Mind you, we are invited to do more than to just put our right foot in.

Not many of us have the grace of Fred Astaire or Ginger Rogers, but we do have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I realize the word 'grace' when used to describe a dancer is different from the theological concept of grace. But isn't the grace of our Lord Jesus that which enables us to overcome much of our human clumsiness and awkwardness? Not many of us would merit an invitation to "Dancing With the Stars," but we do have the love of the God who created all the stars that dance throughout the universe. And doesn't that love invite us onto the dance floor, so to speak, where we can enjoy the divine embrace of a God on the move in rhythm with the created order? We may wish for the magic of Cinderella's ball, but much better than that, we have been given the communion of the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability to put our whole selves into joyful coordination with the God movement.

At last Sunday afternoon's service where I was installed as one of the pastors of this congregation, my main role in the service, other than answering once again the constitutional questions of ordination and installation and being prayed for, was to offer the benediction. To get to do so on a regular basis, often using the words given to us by the Apostle Paul from his ending of the

book of Second Corinthians, is a great privilege. I do not consider these words to be a prayer where I am asking for God's blessing to be upon you. Neither do I control that blessing in any way. Rather, I understand the relationship within the Godhead to be so blessed, that the goodness of that blessing overflows into our lives. I get to articulate that blessing as what I believe is the grandest of invitations to join in the most divine cosmic dance imaginable. The invitation of the Triune God comes to each one of us, asking, "Do you care to dance?" All in all, even though I'm not very good at either one, I find I'd much rather dance than wrestle.

¹ Shirley Guthrie, Christian Doctrine, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.