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Pilgrim United Church of Christ
June 11, 2017 -- Trinity Sunday

Scripture: [Psalm 8](#) and [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

The church calls this day Trinity Sunday. Does anyone actually know what that means? Is it like Sesame Street -- today's message brought to you by the number three? And "the big T up there," as my son said on Easter Sunday. T for "Trinity."

Today we celebrate tricycles, blind mice, and sheets to the wind.

I'm kidding. We celebrate a threesome. A holy one.

We often celebrate *events*, remember things that happened, throughout the church year: Jesus being born; Jesus being crucified; Jesus scaring the bejesus out of everyone and appearing as the risen Christ...

Last Sunday we remembered the arrival of the Holy Spirit: Pentecost.

And our collective memories, our holy imaginings, often Photoshop these events. These stories, like river rocks, finally reach us after years of being shaped by the tides of tradition, so that by the time we hear and re-tell them, they are smaller and smoother, easier to hold. What actually happened in the lives of our faith ancestors was probably far messier, far more confusing, far more frightening than the edited versions we often tell ourselves.

Today -- Trinity Sunday -- we do not exactly remember and celebrate an event, something that happened; we remember and contemplate a metaphysical reality that is confounding, no matter how tradition has tried to round its edges.

Today we celebrate the Trinity: the woven-together co-existence -- the intimate relationship between -- the facets of the divine being we call God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

The language of the Trinity can be traced back to a couple of New Testament writings: In the final lines of one of his letters to the Corinthians (in our bibles it is called 2 Corinthians), Paul offers this benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

We heard the Trinity echoed in Matthew’s gospel this morning, in these words attributed to Jesus: “in the name of the Creator and of the Christ and of the Holy Spirit.” It’s a phrase we lovingly repeat in the ritual of baptism, and boldly sing in the closing line of our doxology: *Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost*. (We sing “Ghost” instead of “Spirit” because rhyming is important.)

The “official” church teaching, the doctrine, of the Trinity was not created until the fourth century in council debates between bishops and in the theological writings of early church fathers. (Unfortunately I do only mean *fathers*.)

Since then, the idea of God existing as three-in-one has been a significant part of Christian theology.

Three-in-one makes sense for office supplies and hygiene products. We’re busy people: bring on the multitasking! It’s smart marketing.

Three-in-one is not as readily applicable to a Deity. Is God a transformer? Aren’t we monotheistic? What kind of loophole is this? What does “God in three persons, blessed Trinity” actually *mean*?

Several years ago on her *Momastery* blog, author Glennon Dolye Melton [confessed what she was discovering](#) about herself in her attempts to be a better neighbor: “My home,” she wrote, “has been filled with people lately. And I’m discovering a new side of myself, who actually *likes this hostessing thing*. It’s like when I got [my dog] Theo and realized...Oh my God, I’m an animal lover! I thought I *hated* animals and now I’m ready to get naked for PETA. *Who knew??* Life is like playing with those little Russian nesting dolls that pop out of each other one at a time....just when you think there can’t be any more versions of yourself . . . look! There’s still more!”

Since “Russian Dolls” evokes weird associations after news from the White House over the past few days, I’ll just call them “Nesting Dolls.”

The Nesting Doll Phenomenon -- that there are more versions of ourselves inside of us that, to our utter surprise, continue to come out over time -- is remarkably true about ourselves, and it's true about our spouses and partners and loved ones, too -- which is probably one reason some version of "for better or worse" is said in marriage vows. Often "better or worse" is not really about what happens to or around us, but what happens in and between us.

Maybe the Nesting Doll Phenomenon is also true about God. We know that all language, all metaphors, for God -- as illuminating as they may be -- are also limited: they stop short of actually or fully articulating what is beyond our understanding and beyond definition. So let me be clear: I am not saying that the Trinity exists as similarly shaped figures decreasing in size that conveniently fit in one easy-to-hold and transport container. (Though how convenient for vacations and family gatherings!)

God is not a Nesting Doll, but there has been and continues to be a series of divine revelations to us that come in multiple expressions. At least that is the experience of humanity as told through the stories and traditions of our faith ancestors. That is the experience and mystery of the Trinity: God as life-giving Creator; the embodied Christ who loves and suffers with us; and God as the advocating, comforting Spirit who sustains us -- three different ways God speaks to and relates to us.

And what about the way the three speak and relate to one another?

Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista theologians have long pointed toward the relationality and mutuality inherent in the Trinity. The Trinity offers a relational model of God and a model of relational power -- of giving and receiving -- that reflects a wider relational reality: our lives do not exist in static separation, but in dynamic interconnection and partnership.

Through the Trinity, God *embodies* multiplicity over duality and community through diversity -- honoring our distinctions and making space for them. God's own being becomes what queer theologian Patrick Cheng calls "an internal community of radical love" with significant implications: we are only whole when we embrace all parts of ourselves (*Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 56-60).

In the Trinity, God reveals and inspires the radical act of embracing all our parts: of less separation and compartmentalization, of more integration -- *integrity*, of becoming whole again.

Speaking of embracing all parts... today's reading from Matthew has made me uncomfortable for many years because of the way it has traditionally been interpreted. Often called "The Great Commission," some Christians take from this passage to mean that we are called to convert, to save, people of other places and faiths. As someone who greatly values interfaith relationships, and honors everyone's experience of God -- and the freedom to choose the religious practices that reflect and deepen that experience, I cannot in good conscience -- in good *faith* -- support conversion therapy of any kind.

I can, however, more fully embody my own faith wherever I am, and wherever I go in the name and way of the Creator, and of the Christ, and of the Holy Spirit: in church, at Pride, at interreligious dinners and talks, in conversations with my wife and my kid and strangers...

In the name and way of the Creator, and of the Christ, and of the Holy Spirit we can try to bring all parts of ourselves to each moment, to show up with all the Nesting Dolls of ourselves -- an internal community of radical love, to help create an external community of radical love, like the woman who brought yeast and mixed it into the flour until all of it was leavened.

Commission comes from Latin roots meaning "sending together." I can't help but wonder if the Trinity itself -- the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit -- *is* the Great Commission: the Great Co-mission. The great "sending together," the great call to go forth and bear witness to life lived more fully, wholly (with a "w"), together.

We celebrate something else today: Trinity Sunday also marks the coming of Ordinary Time. Unlike other seasons of the church year that call us to anticipation and preparation, Ordinary Time calls us to a season of being present, of being with. It is the longest season of the church year, and it is no coincidence that Trinity Sunday is the doorway.

This Trinity Sunday -- this Season of Ordinary Time -- may we radically embrace all parts of ourselves, including, *especially*, what we think is unattractive and unimportant -- in the name of the Creator, and of the Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.