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Holly Presbyterian Church

Genesis 1:1-2, 4a

2 Cor. 13:11-13

“Til We Meet Again”

Years back, in the 50s, everyone knew that the small church was the place to be. These small churches had a major growth problem, I'm sure many small churches would love to have now, they did not have enough seats! Someone came up with a solution to this horrid, treacherous problem...we can have Children's Church.

Many churches would have their congregation worship together up until the sermon. At that time, the kids would go forward to leave the service for their own separate worship service. Another concept came about, why don't we leave the kids with a lesson before they leave... thus the Children's sermon. So the kids would sit and listen to a shorter sermon that was more age and time appropriate for their little ears and attention spans, and then leave the rest of the congregation for their own worship time with some adult leaders or a Children's Minister if the church had one. Some churches even had completely separate worship services for the kids altogether.

Thankfully, I say it this way because the theology of separating kids from the adults doesn't really align with our reformed faith, Holy Presbyterian, at least during the time I grew up here, never went through a children's service phase. In fact, during the time I was here, we didn't even have children's sermons, and they still are a bit foreign to me, although I think it is a great part of our reformed worship services today. However, the church that I interned at this past year, St. Andrews Presbyterian in Tucker, Georgia, did have Children's Church.

St. Andrews would invite kids under 3rd grade, if they would like to, to come forward for the Children's sermon, but unlike the other churches that I previously mentioned to you, the kids would only leave for the duration of the other sermon, immediately returning for the hymn of response. During these 9-20 minutes, depending on the day, the preacher, and how long a sermon God inspired upon them (and we've all sat through those long inspirations...sometimes thinking about what we're going to have for lunch), during the sermon, the children of St. Andrews went into a room down the hall for what they called "Worship Explorers".

Each week either the associate minister, myself or one of the two other adults that helped us with the children would take the kids out to teach them about the different elements in our reformed worship together.

We would teach about baptism, confession, hymns, offering, Christian holidays, and so on.

Our teaching schedules had to be switched for a few different reasons, and I ended up one Sunday with teaching to these adorable preschool, kindergarten, and first and second grade children on the Trinity. It was my job to explain the Trinity, one of the most perplexing concepts in our faith, to little ones. My solution: ask them the simplest question about the Trinity that I could think of, sing a kids song the Trinity, and finally, a coloring page. My question for the kids was, “We have one God who is three persons. Do you know who these three persons of God are?” Their answers: “There is um... God, and um that one that created things, JESUS!, Jesus Christ!... um God.... And um Mary? Joseph? That one guy who stuck a stick in the ground and the waters parted?”

Beyond the straight “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit” it is quite difficult to explain the Trinity. It’s a mathematician’s nightmare, this three in one. We have one God, which consists of three persons, (Creator God, Redeemer God, and Sustainer God) and each of these persons is fully God (Creator God is God...), but we don’t have three gods. Theologians and clergy alike have been stumped at trying to explain this fully and clearly for a very long time.

The egg analogy, which is just as you have three parts of an egg: the outside shell, the yolk, and the slimy clear stuff that turns white when you cook it and all three make up an egg, it doesn't work so well because God is not made up of 3 parts, God is made of 3 persons, and each person is fully God in themselves (a yolk isn't fully an egg in itself), and the three are indivisible.

Neither does the water analogy work completely. This is the one that says just as you have liquid water, water vapor, and ice and all three are still H₂O, you have God the Father, Christ Jesus, and the Spirit and each of the three are still God. The problem with this one is that water can change forms depending on the environment. Each person of God is distinct, God the Father cannot change into God the Son or Holy Spirit.

My favorite analogy is that God is like a dance of three people. Each of the dancers could represent a distinct separate person of God and their moving together creates the dance that is God. I don't like to say this, as this one is my favorite for, as you know, I love dance, but this one falls short too. Each dancer is not the dance, but each person of our triune God is fully God.

This Trinity is so complicated, our God is so wonderfully complex that even scripture itself cannot hold our God or fully explain our Triune God. That is not to say we just through out scripture; scripture is a useful tool. Scripture helps us to see God at work in the world and in our lives. John Calvin, a prominent theologian in the Presbyterian faith, speaks of scripture as a lens, or in his early 16th century words “spectacles” in which we can see God more clearly through.

As we celebrate Trinity Sunday together, that is precisely what the lectionary texts do today. They help us to understand God and God’s work in the world so that we too may accept the invitation to join in the Holy Spirit’s work.

Our first scripture brings us back to the beginning. At the very beginning of our Bible, we do not have an account of how the Trinity works, or that God is Triune. No, instead we have creation. An account that God, in God’s loving perfect self, wants us first to know we belong to God. God wants us to know where we came from and who is in control.

The first story in the bible is not to teach us that God is three, nor is it there to give a scientific and historical account of how the Earth scientifically came about. The creation story's purpose is to teach us that God made us and we belong to God, our God creates orderly and brings life out of chaos, creation is made good, and our God is in control of all.

Yet in the midst of this story we are given a glimpse of the complexity of the Trinity. Scripture says that, "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." The Hebrew word here can mean wind, but it can also mean breath or Spirit. The word here is Ruach; perhaps you've heard of it before or it's Greek counterpart "Nooma". Wind and Spirit in our Scripture interchange. They are both powerful forces we cannot see, yet we can sometimes hear them, feel them, and see the effects of them upon others.

So we learn in this text, secondarily to the lesson on Creation, that God's Spirit was with God in the beginning. And in John 1, we learn that Christ too was in the beginning in creation. We learn that our Triune God works together to create, bring life, move and be active in this world. God is active and moving in my life.

Since the last time I was with you, I applied for a residency program with the PCUSA. The program is based upon the scripture from Esther 4:14b, “Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”

For Such a Time as This residency program reaches out to both graduating seminary students and small churches alike that for whatever reason have had a hard time calling a pastor. The Lilly foundation sponsors this two-year program that aims to both teach the newly ordained pastor, and aid these churches with finding a designated pastor for the next two years.

At the time the application was due, for a number of reasons, I did not qualify for the program. One of the qualifications necessary was that I must be “Certified Ready to Receive a Call,” and I was not. In order to be certified in our denomination, I had to be finally assessed, and in order to be finally assessed, I had to complete a Personal Information Form (and anyone who’s been on these past PNC’s this church has had knows how time consuming these information forms can be to create) and I had to pass my final written ordination exam. At the time the application was due, I had not yet heard back my results from the exam so I couldn’t move forward with the rest to become certified.

Yet I figured, why not just apply anyways and place it in God's hands. This is what I've been working on spiritually with God these last 6 months, "Let go and let God" as some have heard it before. It is the same notion brought forth from the Genesis text: God is in control of all things.

Yet it is really hard for us as humans to understand this and comprehend that God is in control. It is something we have to constantly remind ourselves, to take the worries about the future and place them on God's shoulders where the worry belongs, where the worry that holds us back disappears. This doesn't mean that we don't plan for the future or put our best foot forward for tomorrow, or go out and irresponsibly spend all the resources entrusted to us by God. No, we are still entrusted to be responsible with what God has given us, because we know God is in control.

So knowing that I had location restrictions, because Matt's Nation Guard unit is stationed in Georgia and switching units increases his chance of being deployed again, I still applied to a program in which applicants needed to be able to go anywhere, because I trusted that God was in control. I had a couple of strikes against me with not being certified, and limited to where I could go, but God wanted this for me, made it all work out, and they accepted me as a resident in the program.

It was nice to not worry through all of this, and it worked out. God knew right where God wanted me after graduation. Soon after being accepted to the program, I received a phone call from one of the two churches in the program that were within my distance requirements.

The people on the church's Pastoral Nomination Committee and the Presbytery's Executive Presbyter all received 5 different candidates information packets. They didn't discuss them, but one of the PNC members called me to let me know he thought I was one of their top ones and they would be meeting that night to discuss and choose who they'd like to extend a call as their designated pastor to.

When they met, it was one after another with each person on the committee picking the same person. Shortest meeting they said the church has ever had. They called me on the phone again that evening to let me know I was their number 1 choice, and they would like me to be their pastor. They shared this the next day with the Executive Presbyter, who also had me down as the first choice for this church, who also called me on the phone that day. It seemed that I had phone call, after call, after call. I believe there were 5 calls and 2 emails in this very short expanse of time, and this was all happening while I was reuniting with my husband at Ft. Stewart after his year long deployment to Afghanistan.

I was overwhelmed. God was so strongly speaking to them, and my main focus was on meeting and reacquainting with my husband. After coming home from Ft. Stewart I had to write and turn in two final exams, and finally I had time to sit and just be with God. This time brought me back to remembering what this whole process of becoming a pastor in the Presbyterian denomination has really taught me. The process has taught me how to really trust in other people, and trust in God speaking to and through others. I trust that the Holy Spirit was at work in their hearts to all lead them to one person, and I trust in Christ that this is where our Creator wants me to be.

So I want to thank you, my home church, for letting me share this day with you. Thank you for hosting my ordination ceremony this afternoon, and I look forward to seeing you here then. I thank you for teaching me, building me up, and guiding me in the faith. For you have helped shaped me into the person God wants me to be in this time of my life, the Pastor of Williston Presbyterian Church.

I leave you knowing that the Holy Triune God will continue to bless both of us on our journeys forward, and I leave you with the blessing St. Paul first wrote to the church in Corinth, and the blessing that was given to us every Sunday while I grew up here,

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the
Communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” “Til we meet again. Amen.

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