

“Love Always Stoops”¹

June 3, 2012

I

Well this is Trinity Sunday. Now the problem with the notion of Trinity is that it seems just so ... oh ... I don't know ... unreasonable. And yet ... the holy fact remains that the Trinity is at the core of our Christian faith. One God ... three Persons ... Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer ... or in more traditional language, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... not three gods, but three persons ... one God.

But I know ... even so ... in the end ... or even in the beginning ... it's still mystery to us ... this idea of God ... struggled with over time ... our grasp – the best we can do – our grasp after this deepest Mystery in our lives.

Well ... so ... the idea of Trinity is so hard that lots of analogies and symbols have been developed to grasp at what it might mean. And one of the best I've run into over the years – and maybe you've heard it too – is one offered by Frederick Buechner.

Buechner says that if the idea of God as both three and One seems obscure, look in the mirror someday. And then think about it. See, there's your interior life – known only to yourself ... and those you choose to share it with ... something like God the Father.

Then there's your visible face, which in some measure reflects your inner life, something like God the Son.

Then there's the invisible power you have to communicate that interior life in such a way that others don't merely know *about* it ... but *know* it, in the sense of its touching them, affecting them, changing them, becoming part of who they are ... something like the Holy Spirit – binding us all in community.

Yet, what you're looking at in that mirror is clearly and indivisibly the one and only you! So God the Trinity is something like that.

II

Well, anyway ... in the last analysis, the doctrine of the Trinity is not an attempt to define the nature of God. God is God. And God can take care of God's self. God doesn't need you and me to define God's nature ... mysterious to the core. But Trinity's our groping after how we creatures seem to experience God in our lives.

And so in the end, I think our grasp of Trinity is really our grasp of who we are, who we are and how we are ... and who it is who made us. Trinity's the way we are ... our basic sense of reality ... a sense of the way things are for us.

So. This morning, let me try this. If you think back on the *basic* meaning of Buechner's mirror metaphor, I think Trinity is communion ... a binding in God's Spirit. Let me be concrete.

Psychologists (and I guess I'm still one!) say we're defined as persons in relation to others, not as isolated egos or isolated selves. But that's a fancy way of saying what you already know: None of us exists on our own. "No man is an island," as John Donne put it.

Think about this for a second. What are your very best moments? Your really best moments? Now I suspect that however you cut it, the bottom line of everyone's best moment is this: When you and I are in real relationship with someone who matters to us.

For me ... I think of when my son teared up when I cried over something important ... when I sat across the table from someone I really cared for and held their hand ... when a friend stood by my side when the rug had been pulled out from under me.

I remember these as some of my very best moments. And these were times when I was in relation ... in genuine communion with another person.

And we mark holidays by visiting others, don't we? Why? Well 'cause I think instinctively there's something in us that pulls us into communal life.

And when we're sick, we want someone to be with us. Someone who cares. Someone to acknowledge our sickness and distress. Someone ... to pay attention. And you know, folks who are dying need to be in relationship ... even as the world is slipping away. Most of them are not so much afraid of dying ... but of dying alone.

We're creatures made in the image of God. And our hallmark is communion. Let me give you a real-life example.

I've just finished reading a memoir written by Ian Cron titled *Jesus, My Father, the CIA, and Me*. It's Ian Cron's own story of his growing up abused by an alcoholic, narcissistic father. And it's also his story of being rescued by the love of his best friend, Tyler, who pulled Ian into a healing, Christian community of folks who loved him back from the brink of ruin.

One night ... during their teen years ... Tyler talked Ian into attending a revival service and Eucharist at a local Episcopal church. And during that service, while Ian was kneeling in his pew, he says, "I heard a voice, a voice whisper inside my head, saying, 'I'm sorry, Ian. Please forgive me.'

"I whispered, 'Help me, I can't.'

"Will you pardon me, Ian?' the voice repeated.

"Yes,' I said.

"Then we are both forgiven,' the voice replied."

Later, when it was time for communion, everyone was standing waiting for Ian to move into the aisle. At first he sat back, letting the others squeeze by.

'Cause at first Ian found he couldn't move up that aisle toward the altar 'cause he'd been so mad at Jesus all his life for not rescuing him from his father.

So his friend Tyler stood in the aisle, waiting. "Are you coming?"

Ian writes, "I then stood up ... and edged into the aisle to join the line of all the other knotted hearts limping toward the bread of new and unending life."

Well, many years later – and this is really why I thought to include this example of communion – many years later comes the following scene:

Ian is still struggling after all that time with the meaning of that voice in his head all those many years ago at that first Episcopal service ... before that first communion after years of estrangement from God ... of anger at Jesus.

And he says it was a Miss Annie who solved the mystery for him.

See, Miss Annie was an elderly black woman whom he'd met while he was in seminary – yes, he finally became a priest! And while standing and flipping burgers at a church barbecue, he asked her, "Miss Annie, is it wrong for me to believe it was Jesus who asked my forgiveness?"

"Miss Annie frowned and said, 'Lord, what do they teach you at that school? Did God humble himself by becoming a man?'

"'Yes ma'am,' I said.

"'Did he humble himself by dying on the cross to show us how much he loved us?' she asked – waving her spatula at me.

"I nodded yes.

"'So why wouldn't Jesus humble himself and tell a boy he was sorry for letting him down if Jesus knew those words would heal that boy's heart?'

"'But if Jesus is perfect ...'

"Miss Annie ambled across the five or so feet that separated us and took my hand. 'Son,' she said, rubbing my knuckles with her thumb, 'love ... always stoops.'"

Love ... always stoops.

And that's communion!

Well, I think you and I do resonate with Ian's story. 'Cause I think loving community is imprinted in us ... 'cause that's who we are. And we're at our very best in a good relationship.

And of course if you flip it over to the other side, and think about when you're at your very worst, it's probably in a broken relationship; a hurtful, destructive one.

But I think there's no point in going into that right now. You've been there. I know I have ... at our very worst ... where you and I are least ourselves ... the selves God calls us to be ... in communion with one another.

III

So the point I'm trying to make is simply this: Stories like Ian's contain universal scripts ... scripts that tell us about ourselves ... creatures imprinted all the way down to our genes with this drive toward community. But circling back to the beginning of this sermon about Trinity, I have to ask the big question: Why are we like this, from our genetic makeup to our everyday lives?

Well, I believe that this Feast of the Holy Trinity is the deep answer to that question. You and I are the way we are ... creatures in community ... because we're made in the image and likeness of God. And so I think that's ultimately the meaning of today's celebration. Our idea of God ... as Creator, as Redeemer, and as the Vital Force that undergirds our very life ... our idea of God is a grasp of God as communal being-with. That's what makes God God.

And being creatures, wired with His image ... from our genes on up ... no wonder you and I have a longing, a drive, to be in communion with others, and finally, I believe, to be in communion with God Himself.

Now. What does this mean for our everyday lives? What does it mean for you tomorrow morning when you head off to work? Or school? Or wherever your feet take you?

Well ... here's what I think.

Because God's Spirit binds you to others in communion, I think that same Spirit helps you find your tongue ... helps you find those words, helps you find those gestures that God wants you to speak – like Miss Annie spoke to Ian at just the right time ... “Son, love...always stoops.”

And so what is that special Word that God's Spirit seeks to speak through you in community?

Well, maybe it's a word of courage, courage shown in the way you've met trouble in your life ... and here you are ... still standing! Like Ian ... still standing and flourishing despite his father's abuse.

Maybe it's a word of ... of forgiveness uttered to someone who's hurt you ... as Ian was finally able to whisper to his dead father's ghost ... “I wish you well” – setting them both free. Maybe your word's a word of compassion – of loving friendship ... like Ian's boyhood friend Tyler, who persisted, who never deserted him and who finally lifted him out of ruin.

Whatever your Word might be, I promise you that each one of you has sacred words to speak through the story of your own life lived out in community with others.

And so my point is this: I think this season calls you to listen for this Word. And in listening, you'll find your tongue. 'Cause this miracle of Trinity's Spirit ...this miracle is that God speaks your language. And then God gives you something to say that's worth hearing.

And so here's my final point. The next time you find yourself saying "I forgive you" when you haven't meant to ... the next time you find yourself reaching down to pull someone up who's fallen ... remember ... love always stoops. This is how you are made. This is how you are called to be.

Open your life to the binding of God's Spirit. And see

Amen.

1. Resources used: *Jesus, My Father, The CIA, and Me* by Ian Morgan Cron; *Lectioary Homiletics* for June 2012; *Synthesis* for Trinity Sunday.