

“An Unending Dance of Love”

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New Song Episcopal Church

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Gen. 1:1-2:4a, Ps. 8, 2 Cor. 2:11-13, Mt. 28:16-20

I often end my sermons with a poem, but today I'll begin with yet another poem-prayer by Steve Garnaas-Holmes. It invites us into the mystery of the trinity on this Trinity Sunday. So I encourage you to linger with whatever these words bring forth in you as much as you listen to anything I have to say.

How easy it is to worship our image of God
instead of God.

The Trinity is not a doctrine, it's a koan.
It's a way of slippery=izing our images of God:
God is This, the Opposite of this, and None of the above.
God is More Than One Thing. And The One Thing.
God is beyond our knowing or pinning down;
yet known, revealed, embodied.

The Intimate Beyond, the Infinite Companion,
and the Immediate Arising.

God is mostly mystery, and all love.
Your understanding is fog.
Your certainty is noise.
Your belief is irrelevant.
All there is is love.

Let the Loving Mystery confuse you,
the Unknowable know you,
the Unspeakable do the speaking.

God,
the Lover, the Beloved and the Love Flowing,
holds you.
Let it be so.

“Let the Loving Mystery confuse you, the Unknowable know you, the Unspeakable do the speaking. God, the Lover, the Beloved and the Love Flowing, holds you. Let it be so.”

That about says all there is to say about the trinity! Nevertheless, she persisted.

Some of you have heard me talk about Benedictine Br. David Steindl-Rast's book *Deeper than Words* during recent Spirit School sessions. The book has a strong contemplative, even mystical bent, and an innovative description of the Trinity that fits with the author's deeply Christian and deeply interfaith perspective. He says "every religious tradition is an expression of the human heart's perennial quest for meaning." And all religions are characterized by the three basic elements of meaning – Word, Silence, and Understanding – with a different emphasis in each. "Thus" he says, "all faith is in some sense trinitarian."

In our tradition you could say that God is original Silence – potential, possibility, openness; who speaks the Word of creation and the Word made flesh in Jesus. Jesus bestows God's Holy Spirit on us, which empowers us to understand and enact God's will. Silence gives rise to Word, which gives rise to Understanding, which deepens, Silence, and on, and on. An eternal circle dance of Silence, Word, and Understanding.

The trinity is an unending dance of Love. A Love that pours itself out so generously and generatively it gives rise to another whole Person of Love. The Love of God becomes the Love of Christ, becomes the Love of the Holy Spirit. Becomes the Love of all of us. Becomes the Love of all Creation. Love – becoming, transforming, enlivening. The trinity, living within, among, and beyond us. Ahh.

Now, after these uplifting images of the trinity, I'd like to spend a few minutes crying on your collective shoulders. I've had a very strange Lent and Easter seasons. On the one hand, I've been touched deeply by our worship together and our various Spirit School sessions. So thank you, everyone, for that. On the other hand, I've found myself on the verge of tears many times in recent weeks as I've mourned the state of our world and of the Church's tepid engagement with the pressing issues of our day. Here, I'm talking mainly about Church with a capital C, the broader institutional Church.

I'm sad because there's so much brokenness, poverty, oppression, and violence in the world, to say nothing of our planet teetering on the brink of collapse. And who would have ever thought that a movement that calls itself Christian nationalist would be a threat to our nation's democracy? How did we get here? God, where are you? And Church, where are you?!

Followers of Jesus have been given profound wisdom and the best possible model for how to live in the world. We've been given not only a prototype for being truly human to build on, but the very Spirit of Christ to empower us to live as Christ in the world. Yet, here we are.

There's a good article in a recent issue of *Christian Century* entitled "Deconstructed, Reimagined Faith." Author Peter Choi outlines five shifts he sees happening in Western Christianity. He starts with the shift from triumphalism to lament, which is certainly right on the mark for me.

I've never been a triumphalist in the sense of thinking Christianity is the only, or even necessarily the best way for everybody to know God. But Choi describes the contemporary

version of triumphalism not so much as empire building or even exclusivity but as a “cathedral mentality” that’s all about permanent structures, whether buildings or traditions. He says, and we can see all around us, this way of being church simply doesn’t speak to a culture changing as rapidly as ours is.

Speaking of triumphalism, the mandate in today’s gospel, to “go and make disciples of all nations” is one of the most misunderstood of Jesus’s commands. And destructively so. Discipleship is about choosing to follow, about affiliation by attraction. Discipleship is about kindling a desire in people’s hearts to know Christ because of who we are and how we live. Not because God demands it, but because Jesus’s personhood and the kingdom of God he taught and built are God’s true way in the world. A way of life that brings healing and wholeness – salvation – to all people and all creation.

It breaks my heart that for centuries we’ve been squandering our great spiritual inheritance in so many ways. Again, I’m talking about the C-Church. And agree with Peter Choi that it’s time for Christians to lament, both for the state of the world and for the state of the Church. We simply must release the old way of being church and open ourselves to transformation, painful as that can be.

I’ve been taking two online classes that have also contributed to my inner upheaval, even as I’m learning tons. One class was on Carl Jung’s *Red Book*, which he started just prior to World War I when he had a series of horrific visions that nearly drove him crazy. In fact, his visions foreshadowed events as the war began. As he analyzed these visions and their effect on him, Jung began to conceptualize the “collective unconscious.” He saw how being out of touch with one’s depths where divinity resides can cripple societies as well as individuals.

He taught ways to engage with one’s inner self to help people access the divine within. For our own wholeness, or salvation, and for society’s. Jung had a strict religious upbringing and came to lament that the Church so marginalizes the mystical dimension of faith it pretty much ignores teaching these interior processes essential to our humanity.

And, oh my word, is our nation caught in the bowels of our collective unconscious. Which we’re projecting all over. It’s like we’re lost in a house of distorted mirrors. It’s time to lament and to engage our own, our nation’s, and the world’s deep shadows – within each one of us – so we can begin to heal.

My other class is on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Future of Faith. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor, theologian and pacifist who was imprisoned and executed for his resistance to the Nazis.

Bonhoeffer was horrified by the widespread support for Naziism, or at least acquiescence to it, in the German Church. He came to advocate for Christianity “without religion” because he believed religion was inextricably tied into social hierarchies and oppression, to violence and even mass murder.

For him, there were only two requirements for a Christian. One was to be Christ in the world by conforming one's actions to Jesus's teachings in service to others in an interdependent way. The other was prayer, by which he primarily meant listening to God deeply enough to be able to discern God's call and be obedient to it. That's what makes us Christian. Allowing God to flow freely through us in self-giving Love for others. For Bonhoeffer, the image of God in us is the freedom to live for others.

I wonder how of the time, talent, and treasure available in today's Church goes to these two essential Christian practices – contemplative spiritual formation and service guided by those served? And how much to things like traditional worship, buildings, and even service that doesn't include much proximity with those served, let alone mutuality? These are not mutually exclusive lists, but I think in most churches their balance is out of kilter. And reflects a lingering cathedral mentality.

In addition to the move from triumphalism to lamentation, Choi identifies four more shifts emerging in the faith life of younger generations that give him hope for the future of the Church. He cites the shift from concern about morality to concern for human dignity; the shift from certainty to mystery; from superiority to mutuality; and the shift from rhetoric to embodiment. What a breath of fresh air! A refreshing breeze already stirring in our own community of faith, thanks be to God and all of you.

So, thanks for listening to my lament this morning. My prayer for us is to give ourselves over to this evolution of Christian faith. May we faithfully enter into the trinity of Silence, Word, and Understanding in ways that can help us become God's instruments of healing and wholeness. May we become, ever more, the true Church, the Living Body of Christ in the world.

Again --

"Let the Loving Mystery confuse you, the Unknowable know you, the Unspeakable do the speaking. God, the Lover, the Beloved and the Love Flowing, holds you. Let it be so."

Amen.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes poem "Holy Trinity - Part II" can be found at unfoldinglight.net