

Fresh Expressions of God—2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

May 30, 2021-Trinity Sunday

Such a short little scripture this morning, two little verses, a short farewell at the end of a long letter. Why? Why this short, seemingly inconsequential excerpt on a Sunday the church sets aside to highlight one of its most significant doctrines—the Trinity. The reason is that there isn't very much on the Trinity in the bible. There are no reasoned explanations, no teachings by Jesus or Paul. The systematic theology came later. What we get in the bible are little fragments of experience, fragments that reveal how these first communities of Jesus followers came to a new understanding of God in light of Jesus' life and ministry, in light of their experience of the Holy and the sacred in and through Jesus.

In the beginning of Christianity, before the ancient Church Councils, the creeds and the theologians there is simply the experience of the people. One of the benefits of not reading the bible literally but rather as the witness of a people is it simplifies things. The Trinity is rooted in people's experiences of God. The first Jesus followers continued to experience God as Mystery, as transcendent Creator. But, they also see God in Jesus; they see a man who incarnated God, who allows God to take on his flesh. The notion of Spirit was already there in the Hebrew scriptures as *Ruah*, the breath of God and *Sophia*, the wisdom of God, they now add to that understanding of Spirit by bringing in the presence of Jesus that animates their communities even after his death.

For those of us who care about scripture, reading the bible as the witness of a people changes how we interact with it. We're not reading the bible to get hard, fast, concrete facts about God; we're reading it to learn from the witness of others. There is lots to learn that helps to deepen our faith. The doctrine of the Trinity has lots of wisdom in it; it resonates with my experience of the sacred. I also experience God as transcendent, unknowable creator. I to see God in the life and ministry of Jesus. I experience God as Spirit, a presence that calls me to cooperate with Love's purpose for the world. When we see scripture as the witness of a people we have the wisdom of tradition to learn from and to guide us as we reflect on our own experiences. But, don't allow it to create a box around God. Rather, scripture as the witness of a people calls us to also witness the presence of God in our midst.

Just as those first Jesus followers see and proclaim a fresh expression of God in Jesus, so we to are called to search for and proclaim fresh expressions of God in our lives and our world. If we can start to see the primary activities of faith not as believing and defending certain things, but rather as the way we live our lives—a journey, a relationship of trust in which the mystery of God is revealed to us, then we begin to be open to fresh expressions of the sacred.

Let me give you an example that takes me by surprise recently. As you may know Jayden Jones, my co-presider today presides at the worship service on May 2nd in light of

Rev. Heather's surgery and in order to allow me to finish out my vacation. When I get back I'm curious to see how Jayden does, so I look up the video. Jayden does a great job. But, what strikes me, and I actually feel that it strikes me as I pull back from the screen, is the black candle that Jayden is using as the Christ candle. Later Jayden tells me it's dark purple and they used it because it's simply what they have on hand. Regardless, it prompts me to ask new questions. Why can't the Christ candle be black? Why does it always have to be white? What are we as worship leaders and churches communicating when one of the central symbols of the presence of the sacred in worship is always white? We know the answer, don't we? Why can't the Christ candle also be black, red, yellow or brown? For me it's a fresh expression of God that is made possible by Jayden, by the opening of my eyes and heart in the past year as a result of the murder of George Floyd and taking seriously the call to engage in anti-racist work.

As we go deeper into life knowing our knowledge is incomplete, yet firm in the faith that our God is active, new and fresh expressions of the sacred are revealed to us. Just as when the psalmist ponders over their flock of sheep and considers what they do to protect and care for them and writes that the Lord is their shepherd, the one who leads them to nourishment and protects them. Just as those first Jesus followers experience the sacred in his life and his life beyond death. At different times these are all new and fresh expressions of the sacred that reveal God amid everyday life.

There is great wisdom and faith in the doctrine of the Trinity. However, that wisdom is not to set our minds on one static description of the sacred. Part of the wisdom of the Trinity is in the process of how the doctrine came about; that we live expecting to find God revealed in our lives. We ask the question daily, 'where is God present in this situation?' When we do this our world opens up, we can see the image of God in those that are different from us, in creation, in meaningful work, in tears shared, in laughter, in life. We open ourselves to fresh expressions of the sacred. As people of faith we don't settle for static, rigid definitions of God, because once we do that we don't know God at all. Only when we don't know, do we actually know. Always be open to the Mystery that longs to be revealed to us in our time and in our place.

The other invitation of the Trinity is to witness to the presence of God when we encounter it, just like those first Jesus followers. They were insistent, 'in Jesus we have experienced something of God.' Our world is starved for God sightings. Our world is so full of those who want to give us easy answers, who want to control and give us the illusion of control. But, what the world needs is more surrender, more reverence and awe and humility. So, point to the sacred when you see it, in the land and the water, in the child and the elder, in the animal and the plant, in suffering and in joy. Do this and you will be a blessing to this world. May it be so. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, One God, Mother of us all. Amen.

