

Sermon Text for June 7, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 8, Matthew 28:16-20

“The Trinity”

I just wanted to start today by asking that question that I have been asking since we started worshipping in this way on March 15. It will be three months next week, hard to believe. We have been hearing from you on our surveys and we are all pretty much saying the same thing: we all want to be together again as a family. Some of us are more willing to wait until we come back together again than others of us, but I need to let you know how proud I am of all of you for hanging in there and now today we know for a fact that this too shall pass. We will be together again in this sanctuary. Just when exactly that is, we don't know, but we do know it will not be forever before we gather again.

As the talk has turned to opening up again I have been thinking about what it is that makes us unique? While we do love to be together and we are willing to wait, there is something unique about this First Presbyterian family of which we have been a part, some of us for our entire lives, others of us for a decade or more, and others of us just within the last few years. But there is something that is unique about us, that draws us together. What we have built together over these past few years here in this community I think is unique. We have built up what I would call a relational church. We desire and we thrive when we are in relationship with each other as the body of Christ. We desire and we thrive when we are in relationship with the community. We desire and we thrive when we are in relationship with the world around us or far from us.

But what about our relationship with God? This is where we have to start. When we understand that God wants to be in relationship with us then we are willing to look at all of our relationships differently. When we know that God yearns to be in relationship with us, then we ought to be able to transfer that to yearning to be in relationship with those around us. It has to be a defining aspect of our faith which is played out in our every day lives.

Today we find ourselves on a unique Sunday, it is a Sunday that we call Trinity Sunday. It is the Sunday of the year that we are told that we ought to focus on the doctrine of the Trinity so that you as brothers and sisters in Christ can be equipped with an understanding of the Trinity which would accompany you along your faith journey. It is not inconsequential, it is important to understand how we understand God and we cannot understand God, fully understand God without understanding the Trinity, so y'all better listen up today.

The Trinity can best be understood within this context of relationships which we addresses earlier which I said makes us unique. God is a relational God and so God requires the same from us. God is always in community and so requires the same for us. Today we celebrate one of the greatest signs and symbols of this community, of this which draws us together to God and to each other and that is communion. Let's read our Scripture for today.

READ SCRIPTURE

It has struck me over these past three weeks how we are wired to live and to be in community. We have had a number of deaths over these past few weeks and I need to tell you that they have affected me deeply. We have seen members of our community who have been separated from their loved ones sink into their last days by themselves and without the ability to be with their loved ones, without the ability for this community to reach out to them and visit them as they enter the valley of the shadow of death, and it has affected me deeply, so I can't imagine how deeply it has affected those who have gone through it themselves.

Can you imagine a greater fear than walking through the valley of the shadow of death alone? Psalm 23 says that we fear no evil because the rod and staff of the Lord is by our side. But we assume that also by our side is our husband and our wife and our family members. That has not been happening more recently because of the safety precautions that are in place more than I have ever seen before. It has really driven home to me the fact, the truth, that we were created, we are wired to be and to live and to thrive in community. When that community is taken from us, we die, we are less than what God would want us to be.

When you look at our first reading for this morning and it comes from Psalm 8. Can you read this Psalm without hearing Sandi Patti in your mind as she sings O Lord, O Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth? In vs.4 the Psalmist asks that fundamental question: who are we, how are we wired, what makes us creatures that God should even pay attention to? The answer that we find in vs.5 and following is that God has created us to be in relationship with him – just a little lower than God. God has created us to be in relationship with the rest of his creation – you have given them dominion over the works of your hands.

The Psalmist is establishing the fact that we were created in order to be in relationship with God, with creation, and with humanity. That is how we were wired. That is surely playing itself out now as we find ourselves without the ability to be in the types of relationships with each other that we have been used to having. This wiring that is innately a part of who we are plays itself out also in our second Scripture as the Gospel of Matthew from the very beginning to the very end portrays our fundamental purpose as being in relationship with God.

When we go to Matthew we might as well start at the very beginning of Matthew in chapter 1:23 where Joseph is visited by the angel Gabriel who tells him that this son who will be born to him: “they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.” God’s desire has always been and will always be to be with us. In our passage for today, in vs.20 Jesus ends the Gospel with those same words, to drive home this point that God wants to be in relationship with us, Jesus says: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew begins and ends his Gospel by describing this unique feature of the God that we worship and that is that this God wants to be in relationship with us and over the time of humanity has manifested himself in a way that is fundamentally relational.

When we look at the Scripture in front of us today we find the only time in Scripture where we have this, what we call the Trinitarian formula, spelled out in front of us. Look at vs.19 where you have the command from Jesus not to witness and evangelize, but go and be in community and bring others into your community in the name of the God who is inherently relational, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the only place in Scripture where we have these terms placed alongside each other. Now, there are other Scriptures which give us the sense of the Trinity, of Father Son and Holy Spirit without using those specific terms. We aren’t going to look at them now, but we will in our Bible Study on Thursday. Here they are if you want to be ready: I Corinthians 12:4-6, Ephesians 2:18, and 4:4-6.

It is in this Scripture that we get a glimpse into who the Trinity is, who is this God that we worship. Jesus earlier describe his relationship to his father. Go to Matthew 11:27 “all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” I know, this is where your eyes start to glaze over. What is happening here in this Scripture as Jesus and his disciples are gathered is that he commands them to go but reminds them of the relationship that they have with him which in reality means that they have a relationship with the Father and so by extension the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew the Great Commission which is what this Scripture is called, is a call to go and join and establish relationships. You can’t love someone unless you have taken the time to be in relationship with them. Notice, this Great Commission is not a call to preach the Gospel. Christianity is not a philosophy to which people need to be converted, but rather a unique way of living together in the Messiah’s community. The continued existence of the church despite its myriad sins of commission and omission provides the surest evidence that the promises of God have been kept.

Today we celebrate communion together, this sacrament which reminds us of our relationships with God and with each other. This Scripture states that even while Jesus was with them, some doubted. You see some took Jesus' message of peace, and new life, and the uniqueness of a relational God which requires all of us to live in relationship with each other, and hijacked it to mean that Jesus was preaching a political call to revolution that would overthrow the Roman empire by force. That was never Jesus' message, but some took his message and made it mean that.

I wonder if he had a chance to take back some of the names that he called the Pharisees and Saducees, snakes, sons of the devil, not really nice words, I wonder if he had a chance to take them back if he would have. It may have harmed his message and people may have been distracted by his words to interpret his message as a threat to civil society and the institutions that make up civil society. But the God that we worship has always been one who desires us to live in community with each other, and when there are those who desire to keep the most vulnerable and those whom they dislike and distrust from the table, well, our God is going to insist that all are welcome and that all have the same chance to approach the table on the same terms as anyone else.

Blessed be the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who lives in relationship and desires us to be in relationship as well. Amen.