

“It Takes a Team”

Isaiah 6:1-8 • Psalm 29 • Romans 8:12-17 • John 3:1-17

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Mason, Michigan

May 26, 2024

Trinity Sunday

It's been a hard week here at Mason First Presbyterian Church. We've had a *lot* of hard weeks over the years; it's been years since we've had one *this* hard. Sheren has been our Office Manager and Financial Secretary for nearly 17 years now, and right at the moment there are a lot of unanswered questions about when – or even *if* – she will be able to continue to do that job, in whole or in part. Her family has given me permission to share with you full details about her condition and recovery process, as they know she is near and dear to many of your hearts. This is not the time for a full discussion of all of that, but I do want to share with you one moment from this past week. Trust me, this is relevant.

I think it was the second day following her stroke, and I was in her room in the Neuro ICU unit at Sparrow, with one of her sons. At that particular moment, Sheren was extremely uncomfortable. She looked at me, plaintively, and asked, “Will you take care of me?” I panicked, though I tried hard not to show it. What do you say to a question like that? I wasn't going to say “yes” – there's *no way* I could provide for her all the care that she needs, and I'm not going to make her a promise I can't keep – and I also certainly wasn't going to say “no.” So, thinking quickly, I smiled and said, “It's going to take a lot more than just *me* to take care of you!” She relaxed a bit, and her son chimed in, “It's going to be a team effort.” He's right; it's going to take her medical team, her family, and all of us, holding her up in prayer.

I had a little epiphany in that moment. There are so many things that we try to take on *by ourself*. There are so many times when we think the weight of it is all on *our* shoulders, and ours *alone*. Sure, there are some things that only *we* can do, on our own. But there are many other things that would be better managed if we reached out to others for help. Many times, it takes a *team*.

There's another piece of news you all need to know. It was confirmed on Friday that I am going to need surgery on my ankle. You will recall that I sprained my ankle back in January and I have been in physical therapy ever since. I was progressing for a while, but then I plateaued. Simple things like walking down the stairs or even going for a short walk were still causing a moderate amount of pain. The ortho specialist sent me for an MRI a week ago, which revealed a “high-grade tear” in one of my tendons. Basically, that means it has frayed apart, and physical therapy hasn't succeeded in putting it back together. So they are referring me to an orthopedic surgeon. I am anticipating that I will have surgery sometime in the next several weeks. After that, I'll probably be in a boot for about six weeks, and should be fully back on my feet about three months following the surgery. I'm thankful for all the people who have been helping me along this journey – the urgent care doctor I saw initially after my injury, my orthopedic specialist, the two physical therapists I've been working with, the surgeon I have yet to meet, and the medical staff who will be taking care of me when I have the surgery. It takes a team.

Where am I going with all this? Well, it's Trinity Sunday. It's the one day out of the church year when we focus our attention on the fact that we worship one God who exists in three forms. They are different, and serve different purposes, and yet they are of the same divine essence. It takes a *Team*.

It really hit home for me just how *great* a task it is to take care of the *whole world* – no, the whole *cosmos* – when Sheren asked me that simple question: “Will you take care of me?” If I'm balking at the thought of how much it would be to take care of just *one person*, how much greater would be the task of taking care of *eight billion* people? That's just *human* life. There are an estimated 8.7 million different species of plants and animals on this planet, and *trillions* of individual living creatures of various kinds, all of which were created by God and sustained by the resources that this planet provides. That's a *tremendous* amount of life. But it's just *one* planet. Our solar system contains eight planets, nearly three hundred known moons, and all sorts of other phenomena; outside our solar system, astronomers have identified more than five thousand different planets and approximately 200 billion trillion different stars. That's a “1” with twenty-four “0”s after it. That's an *enormously* massive universe, created and sustained by almighty God. Imagine the *magnitude* of the task of taking care of it all!

So what the doctrine of the Trinity tells us is that: *it takes a Team*. To use classic terminology, there's “God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,” the creator of everything that exists, including what we can see and what we *can't* see. That's the first Person of the Trinity. The Creator. This is the one Isaiah sees in his vision: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty... Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’” This is the God extolled by the psalmist: “Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy splendor. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty... The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.” This is God the Father Almighty ... the first member of the Team.

The second Person of the Trinity, the second member of the Team, is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is “the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father” – that is, he was borne of God the Father before the beginning of time. He is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God” – that is, *the very same as God*, and yet he came from God – “begotten, not made” – God didn't *create* him! – “of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.” Everything that came into being by the Father gained life through the Son. This Son has a particularly unique role: “For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.” That's the Christmas story. He came to earth and took on human form for a particular *purpose*: “for us and our salvation.” “For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.” That's the Good Friday story. “On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” That's the Easter story. “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.” That's the Ascension story, which we retell every year 40 days after Easter. “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” That's the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment, both of which are promised in the scriptures. God the Father is the *Creator*; God the Son is the *Redeemer*. The second Person of the Trinity; the second member of the Team.

If you want a better understanding of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, I highly recommend John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. It is a magnificent creative retelling of the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, told in over ten thousand lines of verse. In one of the chapters there is a remarkable dialogue that takes place between God the Father and God the Son, as they contemplate the consequences of the sin of man, and the *cost* that it is going to require to undo the damage. When I read the book a number of years ago, I was profoundly moved when I read the section in which the Son *volunteers himself* as a living sacrifice to atone for our sins. It truly is magnificent.

There's one more member of the Team, the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, sometimes called the Holy Ghost. This is "the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets." All those prophecies in the Old Testament – both the ones about Jesus and the ones about everything else – are the product of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was present at Creation, the "breath" or the "wind" of God hovering over the face of the waters. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism, in the form of a dove; the Holy Spirit came upon the gathered disciples on the day of Pentecost; the Holy Spirit came upon believer after believer, giving them gifts, power, and strength that far exceed normal human capabilities. This Holy Spirit comes upon us too, endowing us with gifts, power, and strength. Honestly, there are times – like this week! – when I'm not sure how I'm going to manage it all; when I woke up yesterday morning, and even by early afternoon, I wasn't at all sure I'd have a sermon to offer you today. I asked three people for prayers ... and the Holy Spirit came through. That's what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit *comes through*. It's the final member of the Team.

Paul talks about the Spirit. "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption." This Spirit has made us *children of God*. "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" – which is what I was doing yesterday, indeed all week, although I'm not sure I realized it at the time – "it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." Yes, we are suffering, suffering with Christ, who, like us, is crying out to God on Sheren's behalf, with loud cries and tears.

Jesus also talks about the Spirit. "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." There are numerous plays on words here, notably the fact that the word for "wind" and "Spirit" is the same in Greek, so every time Jesus talks about the wind, he's really talking about the Spirit. The *Spirit* blows where it chooses, bringing us life in Christ.

So it's a Team. A Team of Three. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Creator, Redeemer, and *Sanctifier*: the one who, gradually over time, makes us holy. SomeOne *created* us. SomeOne *redeemed* us. And SomeOne is in the process of *sanctifying* us. The Father created us; the Son redeemed us; the Spirit is sanctifying us. They are Three, and they are One. One God, in three Persons. One Team, united in purpose and in essence like no other team. The Holy Trinity.

It takes a Team. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. *It takes a Team*.

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