

“God is Love; and, where true Love is, God Himself is there.”
Delivered 06/11-12/2022 (Feast of the Trinity) at Grace, Traverse City

✚ “We bind unto ourselves, today, the strong Name of the Trinity.” Amen.

This is the feast of the Trinity. The day that we celebrate the very nature of God and that we, who are finite, mortal, creatures, can know anything about the nature of the Divine. And, as Christians, we have come to know God as Three in One and One in Three. A description that has caused headaches for Christians for going on two millennia, now! And to make matters worse, preachers, teachers, and theologians have tried to use analogies, metaphors, and similes to try to approximate what this means and those metaphors always introduce more problems than they solve. St. Patrick’s shamrock is a material object easily pulled apart, and that’s not like God. The analogy of the egg makes it seem like God is not of one substance, and that’s not like God. The three common states for water (ice, water, and steam) make it seem like God’s nature is changeable in ways that quickly become problematic. Each and every one of those attempts breaks down just underneath the surface. And so, we need a new strategy if we are going to have any access to this profound understanding of the Divine as Trinity.

I agree, with those far wiser than I, that a good place to begin is with the first, and greatest, Commandment. When Jesus was asked for it, He quoted Deuteronomy and Leviticus and said that the first Commandment is this: “Love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as if they were a part of your very self.” And elsewhere we read that, “God is love.” And the old hymn says, if you’ll excuse the masculine-exclusive language, that, “God is love; and, where true love is, God, Himself, is there.” And so it is that understanding love must be important to understanding the nature of God. But the word love, in modern English, does not mean the same thing as what the original and ancient words meant. To us, love is an emotion, a feeling, it is something that happens to us as we fall in or out of love and it is beyond our control. But that can’t be commanded! We cannot be commanded to have, or not have, a feeling that is beyond our control, that passively happens to us. So, love, at least the way that we commonly understand it, cannot be the right word for what the Scriptures actually mean. Instead, I’d like to agree with other theologians and propose that a far better translation is loyalty. To be loyal is to make a conscious choice to consider the needs of another when making a decision or taking an action. Loyalty always wonders what the other person is hoping for, and dreaming for, and takes that into account. And when it comes to God, this loyalty that flows between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is unbreakable, eternal, and overflowing. So much so, that, for the Three Divine Persons, They are One God, inseparable, and holy, and wonderful beyond our imagining.

And we, who are made in the image of this God, who is Trinity, are commanded and called to love, to be loyal, like God is loyal. We are called to consider God, and God’s dream for the world, when we are making decisions about how we spend our time and our money. God dreams of a world where everyone has stable shelter and we are each being called to consider how we spend our time and wonder if we are being called to volunteer at Jubilee House. God dreams of a world where everyone has enough food to be sustained and we are each being called to wonder if we are being called to volunteer at the Food Pantry or at the Community Meal. God dreams of a world where everyone has the chance to use their God-given gifts and so we should wonder if we are being called to be a Reader, or a Lay Eucharistic Minister, or on the Altar Guild, or any of the myriad ways to serve the community, maybe even as a Deacon or Priest. And we must ask how we are spending our financial resources and wonder if we have more than we actually need and, if we do, how are we using it to consider God’s dream and our neighbor’s needs. And were you aware that we are all called, on page 445 of the Book of Common Prayer (don’t look now, take that as homework!), to have a will that directs our material and financial goods to religious and charitable purposes when we die? This is not just because we are a people of the Resurrection who believe wholeheartedly that death is not the end but it is because we are

called to consider the needs of others before the time comes when we are not available to make such decisions. That's how seriously we take this call to loyalty! This is what it practically means to be loyal to God and to our neighbors.

We are being asked to wonder this now, on the first weekend after Pentecost, because we are entering into a new season. And it is so very good to be here and join you all in this new season! Thank you for the heartfelt welcome and all the help getting settled in! This long green season begins now, in earnest, and we have twenty-two weeks before Advent in order to work, to grow, to carry out the mission that God has given us to do. And the Church celebrates the Trinity on the first Sunday after Pentecost so that our work in this new season is set upon the foundation of loyalty to God and to neighbor and not solely to our own desires or only for our own good. Let us, therefore, discern what work we have been given to do. Let us say, "yes" to God and what God is calling us to do. Let us celebrate the nature of God and what we have come to know about who God is. Let us revel in being made in the image of the ever-loyal God. Let us, indeed, be a Trinity people, reflecting that image of God back into the world by being loyal to God and to our neighbors. For the first Commandment is this: Be loyal to the LORD your God with all your mind, with all your body, and with all your spirit; and, the second is like it: be loyal to your neighbor as if they were a part of your very being. Amen.

~The Rev. Dr. Derek J. Quinn, Deacon