

Sermon: The Depths of Trinitarian Love

6/7/2020

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

During the last week, to borrow a phrase from our Gospel lesson, I have spent a fair amount of time doubting. Not that racial inequality and profiling exist or that we as Christians should be seeking equality for all. We are all beloved children of God, no matter our race, our sex, our age, or our nationality. There is no justification for what black people have had to endure for centuries, and until we as Christians acknowledge and seek to help right that wrong, we are limiting what it means to love our neighbor. What we have seen the past week is that Americans across the country are tired of the status quo and are reaching their breaking point, and I must admit that I am not that far behind them. I am tired of the injustices that minorities have and are currently experiencing in our country, and that Christians appear either unwilling to or incapable of uniting and calling for a better way. So what, you might ask, have I been doubting? What I have been doubting is what I can and should do.

Often, we equate doubting with disbelieving. Take Doubting Thomas, for example, who we heard about a few weeks ago. Thomas refused to believe that Jesus was resurrected until he saw and touched the wounds on Jesus' hands and side, much like the other disciples had just done a few days prior. Well, when the disciples went to Galilee that day in our Gospel lesson, there were only eleven of them. That there were only eleven of them was a living reminder of all that had happened over the last few weeks. One of their own had betrayed Jesus and handed him over to die. Jesus' death should have been the final word, the proverbial nail in the coffin to his life and ministry. Except that three days later their Lord and Savior arose from the dead, and there he was standing among them once more, teaching them. That day, as the disciples saw and

worshiped Jesus, some of them doubted, not that he was the Son of God. Rather, they doubted because they were struggling to take it all in: Jesus' death and resurrection, that he would soon be leaving them again, the arrival of the Spirit, and the Great Commission that awaited them.

As I thought about their doubt this week, I couldn't help but wonder: isn't that what our doubt looks like too? We believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but we don't know exactly what that means. We know that Jesus has commissioned us, yet we wonder what it means for us to go out and make disciples. We want to follow Jesus' teachings and love God and our neighbor, and at the same time we question just how far Jesus is calling us to go; like whether we should be marching alongside the protesters or taking other actions that truly might address racism and systemic racial injustice. It sure can be a lot to take in. Perhaps that is why today is Trinity Sunday. Because the mystery that is the Trinity—that God is three in one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is exactly what we need to hear when we are starting to doubt.

The truth is that the doctrine of the Trinity will always remain a mystery. For over 1,700 years, Christians have been seeking to understand the term. We have been seeking to understand how one can equal three and three can equal one. And so, we have described God as being like a three-leaf clover, the three states of water (gas, liquid, and solid), the three parts of an egg (shell, white, and yolk), a triangle, time (past, present, and future), three notes in a chord, and by their roles (creator, redeemer, and sustainer, as well as lover, beloved, and love). These examples are honest attempts to understand and embrace the mystery that is our God and should not be dismissed. And yet, they all fall short, because our God transcends them all, even the word Trinity.

God is so much more, because the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is not a thing or a shape or an action. God is a relationship. A relationship of three persons grounded in

complete, mutual, self-giving love. A relationship grounded in what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can give rather than what they can receive. A relationship in which the Father is always reaching toward and talking to the Son, the Son is always speaking to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is always reaching toward the Son and the Father. This relationship is at the very heart of who God is and at the very heart of who God is calling us to be. For, after all, we are made in God's image. And when we enter into this relationship, when we seek to be in communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we will find that our hearts and lives are transformed in unimaginable ways.

This transformation, this whole-hearted change, is what John Wesley was seeking to impress on the Methodist movement when he said the now-famous phrase that there is no holiness but social holiness. That day, John Wesley reminded us that being a Christian is not something that we can do alone. It requires that we be in community, in relationship with one another. It requires that we come together to praise God, to confess and ask forgiveness for our sins, to offer up our gifts and services, and to join in fellowship. No wonder the recent coronavirus outbreak has been so difficult on so many of us. As Christians, we are called to come together in community, we are called to come together as the church, so that we might give thanks to God for our many blessings and extend God's love to one another amidst our many struggles. And for the last few months, it has often felt like we have been unable to do that in its fullness, forcing us to reimagine what it means to be the church and find new ways of being in relationship with one another.

The last few months certainly have been a lot to take in, and it is easy to see why the doubts that have arisen can become overwhelming. They did for some of the disciples that day. And yet, it is important to note, that their doubts did not stop them. Their faith in Jesus, the Son

of God, gave each and every one of them the strength to go out and make disciples. They traveled from city to city, thousands upon thousands of miles, spreading the good news, offering encouragement, like we heard in our New Testament reading, and gathering believers together into churches. Some went to jail, others were forced to flee at the threat of violence, and a few were killed for their beliefs, like their Lord and Savior had before them. The disciples showed us the lengths to which we are called to go if we are truly committed to living out our faith.

Chances are that none of us will ever be threatened with physical violence on account of our faith, nor will we ever be imprisoned or killed for sharing our beliefs. That we will never face such persecution is a blessing for which we should be thankful. And yet, just because we may not experience the same persecution that the disciples did does not mean that we as Christians should not experiencing any. Because the truth is that if we truly believe that there is no holiness but social holiness, if we are truly committed to being in community, then our commitment to being in complete, mutual, self-giving relationships with others cannot just extend to our friends, our family, or this church. It must extend to everyone, everywhere. It must extend to each and every one of God's children, and like I often say to Thane when he is trying to explain away something he did, there is no "but." There is no justification for the death of George Floyd. There is no justification for black fathers having to have "the talk" with their sons. No, not that "talk." Not the birds and the bees. No, what I'm referring to is the talk that they have about what to do to make certain that they don't get killed by a police officer if and when they get pulled over. And yes, they will be pulled over at some point, whether they have done something or not. And there is no justification for the looks that black people get when they are in a so-called "white" part of town. Looks that sometimes lead to the cops being called and people deciding to take the law into their own hands. If we truly believe that there is no holiness

but social holiness, then there are times when we are going to have to take unpopular positions and accept the consequences, because that is what God is calling us to do. That is what God has always called us to do. To be agents of change who earnestly desire that thy kingdom come and thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

The prayer that Jesus taught us is clear. Change is needed, and we have been called to help bring about that change in this world, so that the love that we see in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might be experienced and embraced by us all, now and forevermore. Amen.