

Let the Whole Creation Cry

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Genesis 1- 2:4a
Matthew 28:16-20

We already have acknowledged Fathers Day and some of the wonderful new fathers among us. But today is also Trinity Sunday, when we mark that theological concept of the trinity — you know Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Or for a more inclusive version: Creator, Christ and Spirit. Or Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

The Trinity is a tricky thing. We, who are people of the book, have to admit that though we will hear two trinitarian formulas in the scripture lessons for today, that is about it. There is the passage from Matthew that we just heard — *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

I believe the benediction this morning will be from II Corinthians: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* These certainly mention the three aspects of God, but as a concept, as a teaching, the trinity is not in the Bible.

Not only is the word trinity not in the Bible, it is a pretty hard concept to grasp. (Of course lots of things that **are in** the Bible are hard to grasp.) Trying to put the trinity into words for a sympathetic audience like a church is one thing. If I find it difficult knowing how exactly to explain the trinity to Christians, is it any wonder that Jews and Muslims question whether Christians are even monotheistic? Isn't this really three Gods? How can three be one?

You know me well enough to know that I don't promise answers this morning. However, I do want to explore a wee bit the idea of trinity, and how we might begin to increase our sense of this complex mystery of our faith.

The customary way to talk about the trinity has been "father, son and holy spirit," and I mentioned already an inclusive language version, "creator, redeemer, sustainer." But perhaps there are still other ways to put together this idea of three in one.

When I was a young teenager I tried to understand the trinity through a candy bar jingle. There was something about the Snickers bar being three candies — nougat, caramel and chocolate — in one great taste. I was pretty sure that this was how the trinity worked.

The creation story from Genesis hints at these three parts of God. We might extrapolate that the part of God that creates is the father, and the "spirit brooding over the waters" is the Holy Spirit. This gives us two parts of the trinity but how does Jesus fit in?

We have to go to the gospel of John to help us understand Jesus' role. We read in the opening of John: *"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God."* It is commonly understood that this Word is Jesus. So going back to Genesis 1 — all of these commands, these words that God speaks: *"Light: be!"* or *"Waters: swarm with an abundance of living beings!"*

So it is this Word — the words spoken by the creator — this is the Jesus part.

There it is, simple as that. If we use Genesis and John we get the trinity.

I had trinity on my mind this week. I was at the Shenandoah Valley Bach festival in Harrisonburg on Friday and heard an amazing group play a Mendelssohn piece.

Since there were three players — of course I tried to make a connection to the trinity. I have never heard a trio where the violin, cello and piano were all so evenly matched. They each had small solo lines, each took turns playing more loudly than the other two, but they were never out of sync with each other. They played as if they were one instrument.

It is not uncommon in a trio for one player to be just a bit better than the others or for one player, perhaps unconsciously, to shine more brightly than the other players. But these three musicians all humbled themselves, in the strongest possible way, to the music and to each other. The result was an astounding unity that brought the house down.

When I pondered with my father-in-law the theologian whether this was similar to the trinity, he was adamant **that this was not like** the trinity. Even though they played as one and were unified as three people can be, they were three separate people playing three different instruments. The trinity is not three separate beings.

He helped me understand that we sing “God in three persons, blessed trinity” but it is really God in three “personas.” It is like when the Greek actor would put on a mask and be one persona, and then put on a different mask and be a different persona. And then yet a third mask with a third persona. It was all the same actor, the same person but with three personas.

This is the trinity. It is the same God, all the time. One mask shows us Creator, another mask shows us Spirit and yet a third mask reveals Jesus but it is one actor.

And while the reading from Genesis this morning featured three voices, revealing clearly the part of the text where it says “let us make humans in our image” — this was three different people reading so it wasn’t really a model of the trinity either.

I suppose it is presumptuous of me to try to come up with my own metaphor for trinity, especially since my terrific candy bar image was not even a runner-up in the WITH magazine contest for catchy ways to describe the faith. (WITH was the Mennonite magazine for young people that started in the 1960s and went out of publication sometime in the last decade.)

One of the things that makes God a difficult construct for me, and thus the trinity difficult as well, is that we tend to anthropomorphize God; we turn God into a person like us. So I am often trying to come up with ways to talk about God that does not make God human, but still is something we can begin to understand if not grasp totally. So I test this idea with you.

What if we personify God less and instead tap into what we see of God in the world. The goal is to find aspects of God that also seem to be aspects of humans as created in God’s image.

I choose beauty, breath and action. They can be found in each of us and certainly they sound familiar as characteristics we attribute to God. Beauty, breath, action.

Breath. We describe God as the animating breath: the breath that hovers over the waters of creation; the breath that as wind swept through the crowd of believers at Pentecost; the breath that Jesus breathes on the disciples after the resurrection — breath that blows away fear creating room enough to receive the Spirit.

Of course breath is what makes us live even though we often are not aware of it. But when we do become aware of our breathing, the possibilities for expanding our lungs, for taking in air and sending oxygen throughout the body, nourishing the whole body with a deep breath — it is not only the body that benefits but the spirit as well. The breath, in the stillness opens us to new possibilities and to see what is all around us — beauty.

We often hear people say that beauty is what connects them most to God: beauty in creation, beauty of art, in music, light, rushing water, in bodies. We express beauty in and through our bodies.

The Psalms are full of the beauty of creation, the beauty that is created. Song of Solomon describes the beauty of bodies with images from creation. Jesus draws attention to the beauty of the lilies, the birds, the beauty of children. Jesus seems to say that the response to beauty is to marvel at it, to take a deep breath and breathe it in.

Action is a bit harder to distill since breathing is an action; making beauty is an action. For instance, laughter is an action that incorporates great breaths, and I would argue also brings beauty to the world. When I think of action here, I am thinking not only of the act of contemplation (which for me would be the breath) or the act of creating (which would align with beauty), but acting on behalf of others in justice — standing with others, speaking with and for others, offering healing, offering one's presence.

Action is essential to how we are in the world. Sometimes we act in continuity with the breath and beauty; sometimes we act counter to it. Sometimes we act for peace, other times we act in violence. Sometimes it is our inaction that is more unkind than our action.

The part of the trinity that immediately comes to mind with action is Jesus, who, we are often told, acted by dying on the cross. As Anabaptists, we more often focus on the actions of his life — teaching, preaching, healing, traveling cross country, speaking with people that others would have left alone.

The Spirit acts, the spirit comes upon people throughout the Biblical story. And what is birth and creation, what is fathering if not a huge action. So this third word — action — is almost a response to breath and beauty. It is a re-action to what is already there.

I am no systematic theologian. I am sure there are further ways that these three words — beauty, breath and action — can be examined though perhaps these are too trivial to reveal the truth of the trinity. Maybe they are too similar to actually plumb the depths of the meaning of trinity.

On the other hand, maybe seeing the close connection between beauty, breath and action allows us to see in new ways the seamless connections in God the father/creator/mother, God the Spirit/ wind/breath and Jesus the incarnate/lover/friend/brother.

Trinity is a great mystery of our faith, a truth with which we must grapple and yet which we can hardly begin to understand.

How can we respond to this gift of trinity except to cry with all creation — Alleluia!