

Trinity Sunday 26A Sermon
May 31, 2026
Trinity Episcopal Church
The Rev. Sarah D. Thomas

I heard a story – one that takes place in the late spring of southeastern Utah. The author, Terry Tempest Williams, is not religious. She does not identify with the Christian faith. But when I heard this story, I thought ... that could be a story for Trinity Sunday.

Trinity Sunday is the day when the church traditionally honors the doctrine of the Trinity – the theological concept, developed over the early centuries, of describing God as three-in-one. Scripture does not say that God is a Trinity – that is an idea that developed over many years – but there is scriptural language that hints at it. We heard some of it this morning. The Trinity is one way the church has grappled over time with what is, ultimately, a mystery. The closest we can come is glimpses or hints.

Here is Terry Tempest Williams' story from her recent book *The Glorians*.
[I paraphrased it in the actual sermon].

In late spring, fierce winds converge in our valley in the red rock desert, a reliable occurrence that has shaped this erosional landscape. The winds are particularly strong one morning in May. I am outside admiring the coyote willow draped in magenta flowers – each one resembling a snapdragon blossom only larger, the length of my index finger. Suddenly, in a swoop of wind, our stone patio is strewn with flowers. They are too lovely to let lie, so I decide to gather them and bring them inside. I get a basket from the kitchen. When I return to the patio, the wind has blown most of them away. I bend down to pick one up, only to see it move. Not only does it move, it has legs. I realize the blossom is being transported by an ant. This wee little being appears as a small black boat with a large pink sail above its six-legged body. I follow it.

For close to half an hour, I walk behind the ant as it carries a petal clutched in its mandibles and moves across the patio at a quick and steady pace. It continues down the stone path from our porch, then sets off emerging from the desert floor like a raised fist.

Each time a breeze comes up, threatening to blow the tiny ant over, a pair of attending ants appear to hold the ant steady, then disappear. Each time the ant is about to cross a perilous path facing cracks between stones, again a pair of ants appear to ferry the ant across the chasm and, again, disappear. The ant continues on its mission, projecting its strange shadow ahead. As it approaches a wide patch of prickly pear, I think surely this will be its demise, the flower impaled by a spine. And then, miraculously, three ants appear to help lift the blossom above, around, and over the cacti, and once on open ground vanish.

When the ant finally arrives at the ant colony, I watch it slowly climb up the hill with the magnificent blossom intact. The ant reaches its destination, pauses, then lays the flower down at the entrance of its home, where it is instantly met by dozens of workers who, in a frenzy of purpose, cut the flower into tiny pieces, each one carrying a part of the pink blossom down into their chambers, where I imagine they are lining a pathway to the queen.

You might think it strange that I tell this story as a hint of the Trinity. I like it because it is earthy. It is of the ground and available, not far up and away in the sky somewhere. It is a poetic story, really, which is one of the best ways to do theology. It paints a picture of fleeting beauty, unexpected accompaniment, an interrelated economy where nothing is wasted, and a loving witness. Can you see the Trinity somewhere in the story?

We need new images for God, which will help us find new images for humanity.

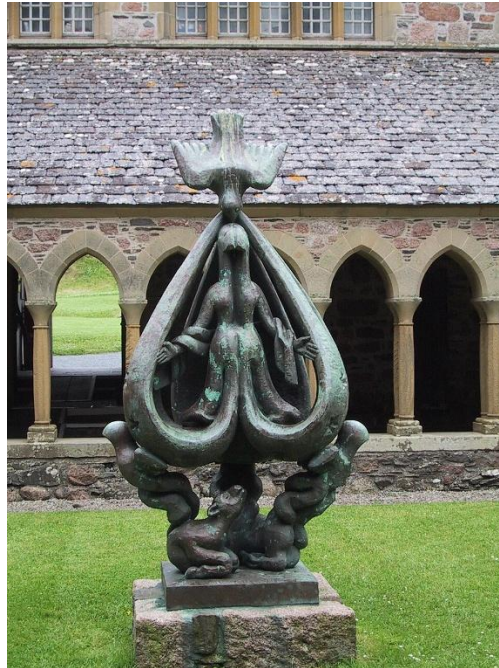
Let's look at our reading from Genesis: the beautiful creation story. It is read on Trinity Sunday because it has God saying, "Let *us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness." So, from the very beginning, we have a hint that God's nature is more of a communion than a singularity.

But there is trouble in the way this text has been interpreted over the years. Once humans have been created God says, "Let them have dominion [over the earth.]" "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it." This can be read as giving humans the entitlement to use the earth and to be separate from it and superior to it. Thomas Berry preferred the word "Earthlings" to "humans." We are creatures made of the Earth and we belong to it, instead of created beings that are separate from the earth and made to transcend it. We need new images for humanity. I like thinking of us as "Earthlings."

This Genesis creation story also makes it look like humans are the pinnacle of creation – the most important part. In our church school, however, there is a wonderful exercise the children do. It is called the Fettuccia, which means ribbon in Italian. This ribbon is very long, and the children roll it all the way out. They go outside and stand by the back wall on Micheltorena and unwind it all the way around to the back door of the church. It is as if the children are unrolling time. Each rib on the ribbon represents 1000 years. I was looking at the teacher notes that go with the ribbon and I laughed when I read, "The universe is about 14 billion years old since the Big Bang. We don't have a ribbon for that. We have one for our solar system which is 4.5 billion years old." Suffice to say, the ribbon is long. The best part is that the creation of humankind comes way late on the ribbon. The part with humans and Jesus, etc., takes up this tiny section towards the end of the ribbon. I love how we teach our children that the creation story in Genesis is not antithetical to that long ribbon with humans toward the end. Humans are special, yes. God-breathed, even. But so is all of it. It is all humming with God.

In John Philip Newell's beautiful book, *The Rebirthing of God*, he tells the story of a place of prayer in Indiana called the Roofless Church. It has four walls, but it opens to the sky. In the center, there is a sculpture by the artist Jacques Lipchitz. It was made soon after the second World War. It shows a dove descending onto an abstract feminine form that opens to give birth. We see a nod to the Jesus story when the Spirit descended as a dove at his baptism, we see a figure encased in what looks like a womb, which can suggest Mary carrying the Christ child, and we also see a divine figure opening to give birth to what might be the entire cosmos. The artist made three casts of the sculpture – one was to go the Roofless Church in Indiana (where it still is), one was to go to a Catholic church in France, and one was to go to our very own National Cathedral in Washington D.C. However, when they saw the sculpture, they refused it. Not appropriate for a church. Instead, they commissioned a different artist to create a statue of

George Washington in military garb riding a horse. It is still there today. Lipchitz' sculpture eventually found a home on the grounds of the Iona Abbey in Scotland. The artist's original name for the sculpture was *Our Lady of Delight*, but the Presbyterians on Iona found that a bit too much so they renamed it *The Descent of the Spirit*. I guess the "delight" and the "birthing" was too much for a Christian setting. How much we have lost.



We need new images for God. And for humanity. We are impoverished. Newell writes, regarding the sculpture, "Every time I see her I feel that her time has come. More and more it can be said that she belongs to this moment in time. She represents the recovery of the feminine that we are in the midst of, and with the feminine a recovery of the awareness that everything that is born is sacred." The sculpture depicts a birthing form creating the cosmos. But it is also a Christ figure. Both belong. I see it as a symbol of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- Christ, Creator, and Compassion -- Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer -- Life maker, pain bearer, love maker.

Just last Sunday we witnessed, we participated in, four baptisms that took place right there at the font. It often moves us to tears. What is it about baptisms that moves us so? We all might have different answers, but baptism is a mystical participation in the dying and rising and sending of Jesus. As we look on and bear witness to this sacrament, we are participating in the Trinity itself! At a level that perhaps our minds can't grasp but our hearts can, we are swept up in the movement of the triune God. We participate in something that looks a bit like that sculpture – and even though we hear the words Father and Son, it is also Mother and Daughter and the song of all creation itself.

We need good images for God and the concept of God-as-Trinity is helpful because it is relational. It goes against the image of God as a monarch on a throne and it grounds the divine in community, in self-giving, in interrelatedness, and therefore in a better image for humanity, since we are made in God's image.

Episcopal churches are named after people or holy days. Our church happens to be named after the Trinity, which, if you think about it, is a good fit for who we are: a community that grounds itself in the radical welcome of God, drinks deeply at this table, and is sent out into the world in the name of love and justice.

We are at a point on our planet where the old ways aren't working. If we are made in the image of God, and if that God is in itself a relationship of self-giving love, a beautiful divine economy that infuses the earth and all its beings, that has important implications. We still suffer from thinking that we are here and nature is out there. Newell writes, "We are not an exception to the cosmos. We are not an addendum. Humanity has emerged from within the matter of the cosmos. What is deepest in us – our longing for relationship – reveals a yearning that is within all things."

This truth is revealed in that sculpture. It is revealed in baptisms at the font. And it is revealed in the mystery behind the story of the ants and the blossom. We are not separate – from anything. We are a part of it all and God is with us and around us and behind us and beside us and within us. And within all creation.

Image credit: The Descent of the Spirit by Lithuanian Sculptor Jacques Lipchitz
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lipchitz_Descent_of_the_Spirit.jpg