Trinity Sunday (year A), 1st Sunday after Pentecost June 7, 2020 (St. Brendan's Deer Isle)
Days of Wrath, Pandemic, and the Holy Trinity by The Rev. Lev Sherman (part Frank Logue)
Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

The events of the last two weeks are another shock to the system of the US. I call upon us to hold in our prayers today: the families of **Breonna Taylor** (Louisville), **Ahmaud Arbery** (Brunswick GA), and **George Floyd** (Minneapolis). The timing and cruelty of Floyd's death, captured in several videos, show white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin casually kneeling on the victim's neck. Floyd's anguished gasps before he died from choking on May 25 were familiar: the same words **Eric Garner** uttered on a Staten Island street corner in **2014**: "I can't breathe." Even more shocking is this statistic: a black person is killed by a police officer in America at the rate of **more than one every other day**. This fact has spurred a national uprising. The protests have also triggered civic unrest in America at a scale not seen since the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. All this on top of the still-increasing losses of the pandemic. Of course, we continue to pray for all those victims and their families as well. Lots of prayers, and so much to do.

To say the least, grasping the essence and presence of God is both urgent and important. Today, Trinity Sunday, is not one of an abstract-sounding church doctrine, especially now. We find in scripture and the teaching of the Church that the nature of God is, most of all, an **essential connectedness**. This <u>communion within God's own self</u> gives us a glimpse into the very heart of God. And, knowing that a deep connectedness describes well the universe in which we live, speaks to the longings in our own hearts as we are separated from others.

Before God created everything we see and know, **there was a communion of three separate persons of the Godhead who created us out of love, <u>FOR love</u>**. Not just one being, but **relationships and communion**, before time and forever. This is why we were created: to be in healthy, loving, generative relationship with God and all creation. And out of this web of relationships comes both our salvation and the redemption of all creation.

II > The word Trinity never appears in the Bible. Yet, in passages like our reading from the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel, we read of baptizing new followers of Jesus in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We read a different Trinitarian formulation in Second Corinthians, "The

grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."

We find that **the first Christians were less concerned about any doctrinal speculation than in <u>following the way of Jesus</u>.** They patterned their daily lives in prayer and fasting, in service to others, and gathering for worship. Into that community, they baptized new followers using that same Trinitarian formula. In time, they came to think through what it meant to speak of a God who is both one and three.

All through the Bible, there was both the idea of one God and the description of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Greek writers would use the term ***trias,*** and the early church writer Tertullian coined the Latin word, *Trinitas*, or "Trinity". He also coined the words "Person" and "Substance" to describe what his mind saw when he contemplated the scriptures regarding the three-in-one God. Tertullian would say that there is a Trinity—a triad—with three separate persons being of a single substance.

We could speak of analogies for the Trinity **but trying to describe what we mean falls short**. John Wesley's example of three candles in a room, yet one light by which to read. Or like H_20 being steam, water, and ice. But whatever language we use, **we know God is <u>not two dudes and a bird</u> ! (Logue)**

John Wesley put it this way**: "Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the triune God!"** <u>God is more than we can wrap our minds around and that is necessarily so</u>. Yet the **Trinity is not a mystery in the sense of a puzzle we can't solve; the Trinity is a mystery in that we see the truth of it, but there is more than we can fully comprehend.**

Using the word mystery, in this case, is closer to describing as mystery the love among humans or even humans and pets. We know so much about those we love, and yet new occasions arise which reveal there was more to discover in the relationship with our child or spouse or parents.

And from this truth, consider the most basic Triangle: our own beginning, father, mother, son/daughter. All else we become, whether from good, bad, or neglectful beginnings, goes forward from this triangle. So, in many ways, it is the best and deepest of personal symbols.

III > We can and do know of God from God, by the revelation of scripture, from the way God is revealed in nature, and through that most perfect revelation of God, Jesus the Christ. And yet, there is **more than we know** – a mystery that is deeper than our minds can fathom.

If we humans preferred to be alone and came together only rarely to procreate and then separate as some animals do, the theory would fall short at this point. **But we humans love to get together**. This is a lesson learned so well during the shelter-in-place orders that have come with the pandemic. We are, in fact, the **beings in communion we were created to be** (why the term "social distancing" is incorrect: we should repeat constantly "**physical distancing**"). Being separated by the coronavirus has not broken that sense of communion. Across the Church, people are finding ways to stay connected. Imperfect as they are, **our new ways of joining together come from a deep longing which is in the very heart of Holy Trinity** (seeing each other on these little screens: at LEAST looking each other in the eyes)!

Jesus would put it this way: This is that for which we were created: **love upward toward God** and **outward toward humankind**. That web of relationships is very interconnected. Love of God draws us to other people. Loving other people fully means seeing them as God sees them, and so loving people can also draw us to God; the communion for which we were created. In this time of physical distancing to stop the spread of the virus, we are discovering more about how deep our human longing for community really is.

So there is no social distancing: we are drawn more and more to each other. AND we are connected deeply to **all of creation**. Mark Twain wrote: "God doesn't make mistakes. But with the fly, he came close!" Or we might add, he PROBABLY did with the black-fly and the mosquito. But in truth, this virus can awake us in many ways to the sometimes confusing, but nonetheless vital and deep connection to all of the universe around us. That is the essential reality the Trinity helps us to understand.

Just as we began these thoughts today, we recognize that we live in a society with great divisions. Many are driven more and more by anger, fear, despair, and anxiety. But just as vital, as necessary to survival as the natural resistance to injustice and needless brutality, is the rich heritage of our faith which is there for

us. The knowledge NOT to withdraw or be part of judgementalism; but to move forward in the love we are created to show in our reaching out to others; to act out God's love **in all the ways available to us**. By staying in contact, by MAKING new contact with others; it is a huge part of how God blesses us, letting us be a conduit of grace.

Early Christians put the practices of faith ahead of trying to be precise about what they meant when referring to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We, too, can prioritize practices of faith and let our understanding catch up later. The real grace in our understanding of the Holy Trinity is that it shows us that none of what we want to do for others relies on us alone – for the Holy Spirit will work through the imperfect words and actions to connect us to other people- ESPECIALLY to those who are the most misled, downtrodden, or alienated – to connect us ALL more fully to our one true, and Triune God. *Amen.*

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*Opening facts from "Why The Killing of George Floyd Sparked an American Uprising," by ALEX ALTMAN (**Time Magazine**, JUNE 15 2020)*

Sermon based on one for this date (TEC Sermons That Work): The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue, Bishop of Georgia. He previously was the church planter for King of Peace Episcopal Church in Kingsland, Georgia.