Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8 John 16:12-15

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church June 15, 2025

If you were to look on the internet for images of the Holy Trinity, you would find that almost all of them are made up of three of something, each of those three "somethings" connected in some way… as in three sides of a triangle, three interlocking circles, three dancers holding hands, three spirals spiraled together…

And it makes sense, really, as each of these images is intended to help us understand the "impossible to understand" way in which God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one in three and three in one… Three being the "magic number" which, as our faith tells us, holds the mystery of the Trinity together… the mystery of the infinite God made intimate in Jesus whose presence moves **among** and **with** and **in** all of creation… A mystery sometimes described as **"God, in Christ, for the world…for us,"** continuing the creating, healing, liberating passion of God that has moved **over** and **in** and **through** the world since the beginning, and promising to move over and in and through the world always, no matter how dire the events of the day may be…

The "three-ness" of the Trinity offering us enough mystery to ponder for a life-time without a doubt… But this morning I'd like to suggest that at the very heart of it, the deepest mystery of the Trinity lives and moves and has its being in a different number hinted at in the image on the front of our bulletin…

Which is an icon painted in 1425 by Andrey Rublev, originally intended to represent the three visitors to Abraham in the 18th chapter of Genesis, but which, over time, has come to be known by other names… such as the "The Icon of the Holy Trinity", and, as it was titled by theologian Henry Nouwen, "The House of Love." But I'd like to suggest that by whatever name it's called, the icon opens new insights about the number of persons actually in relationship within the Trinity… a number not always apparent in the traditional images of three connected lines or circles or spirals…

And while you might want to draw my attention to the fact that there are indeed three figures sitting at the table, re-enforcing the traditional "three-ness" long associated with the Trinity, I want to suggest there is something else there for us to recognize… And I will do so by sharing an experience I had two weeks ago when Michael and I went to hear our grandson Dylan's middle school band concert in the Bangor High School auditorium…

So what you have to know is that when preachers go anywhere out in the world, they bring with them (in their hearts and minds) the themes and texts for the next Sunday they are scheduled to preach…(Which makes it really fun for the spouse of a preacher to go out with them anywhere for a night on the town)… But be that as it may, knowing that my next Sunday in the pulpit was going to be today, Trinity Sunday, I was already anticipating seeing and hearing the middle school concert through that triune lens, with the

-"music of the cosmos"

-being made "incarnate" and "real" in the students and their instruments,

- and then sent out into the auditorium on the waves of sound that would come to our ears…

Rather like…

- the God of the cosmos

- made incarnate and real in the person of Jesus,

- whose presence is then sent out into the world on the breath of the Spirit…

And the concert fit my triune expectations just perfectly… until the band director announced that the next song the band would be playing was a song about bullying, written by a composer named Randall Standridge who had been bullied as a child… The band director then going on to say that during rehearsals many of the middle-school students had talked about how they had experienced bullying, and what a devastating effect that had had and continued to have on their sense of self confidence and well-being…

So, as the band director told the audience, the students, in their attempt to deal with and speak of the effect bullying had had upon them, decided to hold up signs as they played the song by Randall Standridge entitled “Me”… each student holding up a sign that spoke to the characteristic inherent in themselves for which they had been bullied or made fun of…

So, as the song was being played, in a beautifully choreographed presentation, one at a time, students stopped playing their instruments for a moment while their fellow band members kept playing… one-by-one they stood up, and held up signs that read in big black letters, things like, “I have ADHD”… “I have an eating disorder”… “I worry a

lot”… “I have trouble paying attention”… “I like the color pink”… “I am sensitive”… “I am dyslexic”… “I have red hair”… “I lack self-confidence”… “I cry easily”…. “I am kind”… “I act more confident than I am”… “I am short”… “I believe in God”… “I’m hard on myself”… “I have braces”…. “I use hearing aids”… “I have trust issues”… and on and on…

Each student holding up their sign while their fellow students in the band kept playing, and then, after their turn, putting down their sign, and picking up their instrument to play again while another student put down their instrument and picked up their sign…

And let me just say that at the end of the song the audience sat in stunned silence… the people next to me were crying… and then everyone broke into an applause that seemed like it would never end…

- Partly, I think, because the adults in the room were overwhelmed by the courage their children had shown by admitting their vulnerabilities, even as they made beautiful music…
- Partly perhaps because I think it’s possible that some of the parents didn’t even know their child was carrying the pain of being bullied until their child held up his or her sign…
- Partly perhaps because the adults themselves recognized things they had been bullied for as a child… or as an adult…
- Partly perhaps because some of the adults remembered times in their lives when they had bullied others for the same characteristics printed on some of the signs their children and grandchildren had just held up for all to see…
- And partly perhaps because everyone in that auditorium was aware of the mean-spiritedness and bullying that pervade so

much of the world and our nation in this moment, manifesting itself in violence and hatred…

So when their children and grandchildren held up those signs and named the truth of what we are all experiencing, even as those children made beautiful music, we in the audience were all overcome… un-done…

And I realized that in that moment there wasn't just the expected trinity of

- cosmic music
- made incarnate in musician and instrument
- and waves carrying the sound through the Bangor High School auditorium…

But also a shared recognition of our connection as human beings… our inter-relatedness in the fragile, beautiful, messy, vulnerable thing we call life… And the immense gift of sensing something between us, no matter how different we may be, that felt like compassion or empathy or kindness… Even between me and the guy sitting across the aisle wearing a red hat…

And I realized that in the trinity of music and musicians and sound waves moving across the Bangor High School auditorium, there was something else… and that something was us… Each of us… all of us taking a seat at the table in the space left open within the mystery of the Trinity… Look, not just three at the table, but four and more and more and more…

And while I'm still not sure if the relationship between the music, the musicians, and the audience was the thing, or if the vulnerability of the moment was the thing, what I know is that for a brief moment we were all a-tuned to the same thing, for which I have no name, but for which I give profound thanks…

The thing that I have come to see lives at the heart of the Trinity… The thing that has moved over the chaos and darkness from the beginning…. The thing Jesus incarnated in such a way that Rome could not stand it… the thing that moves around and under and through us right now… the thing we are called as a church, as a community of faith, to tune our lives to, and then to bear witness to….

The thing for which there seems to be no adequate word except "love"…. The Presence that opens us with such excruciating beauty we gasp, and look up, and see that we are all invited to sit at the open place at the table…

And here's the thing I want to say today about the three-ness of the Trinity… The Trinity isn't just a **doctrine** built on the number three… It's an **invitation** to see how the power of the three – **"God in Christ for the world"** – expands to make four and more and more and more, all of the "more-ness" connected in the constellation of God's un-boundaried love…

It is an invitation to see in the three the relationship between you and me and everything in the world God so loves… An invitation to choose to take a place at the table along with all others caught up in the music of God and to choose a life of the blessed "we" over the miserly little "me"…

Or, as 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart once put it, it's an invitation to see that "between us and God there is no between"… Which means "between you and me, and us and the world there is no between"… The presence and essence of God moving in and around and within us, as close to us as the air we breathe, uniting us into one body we Christians call the body of Christ…

In many ways it may seem ludicrous, or maybe a bit "pie-in-the-sky" to spend time thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity this morning, or hearing about a "oneness" experienced by a bunch of people in the Bangor High School auditorium, as if such a oneness could have any meaning for us today as full-out war between Israel and Iran threatens the entire region, and Palestinians in Gaza continue to starve and suffer and die in the most inhumane conditions imaginable, and the war in Ukraine rages on, and elected officials and their spouses are killed in their homes for political reasons, and tanks roll down the streets of Washington DC, and every kind of craziness tears at the fabric of our society…

But what I want to suggest is that our faith story invites us to see something within the darkness that offers something else… namely **God in Christ + for the world, for us**… Moving in and around and through the suffering world… and rising still, rising in places we might never expect, every time love is shared and kindness is extended and justice is done… the "three" becoming four and more and more and more… Even in the Bangor High School auditorium… And assuring us that because this is true, we can live in hope and trust, and dare I say… even joy…

I'm not sure if anything I've said this morning holds together in a nice, tidy and cohesive package… It's really hard right now to shape something that holds together in such a way…

But in just a moment we're going to sing a hymn in which we are invited to join in the dance of the Trinity… And after that we're going to affirm our baptisms as we officially receive new folks into the St. Brendan community…

And in the affirmation of baptism we will remember the love poured over us in our baptisms in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit… We will renounce the Devil and all his empty promises… We will speak our intention to practice the things of faith that include sharing the good news of God in Christ, serving all people, and striving for justice and peace in all the earth…

And in all of this we will be taking our place at the space made for us at the table in the "house of love"… This space, where, in the presence of God made incarnate in Jesus and sent forth into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are claimed in love and marked by the cross of Christ forever…

The place where we are always welcome, no matter how weak our faith or how uncertain our lives may be… And there, we will simply try to trust, even amidst all the fears and tears of the time in which we live, that in the Trinity of relationship offered here we will be held in the constellation of God's immense love always and forever… no between between us... set free from fear to share that love in the name of the One who teaches us how + and who even now is inviting us into the dance…