

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"God's Identity/Our Identity"
Dr. J. Dent

June 19, 2011
Trinity Sunday

We've just come back from an extended holiday with bookends of weddings. We had Stacy's best friend Sonja getting married near Niagara Falls on May 23 in St. John's Anglican and we had our godson Chris getting married on June 11 in St. John's Anglican in Vancouver. In the middle we went to Malta, which is an island about 200 km from both Italy and N. Africa, for ten lovely days, to take up our friends' offer of staying at their hotel there.

Now we're back home. And I realize there are core moments in our lives where we experience the center of who we are. We take trips to see a couple get married. This is probably one of the most focused events in a person's life, when they decide to make this public decision. Many are choosing not to get married any more. But those who are married have a connection to the One who created the mystery of two becoming one, which is much more than the sex act, but really a mystical union. Now we who are married continue in our individual lives and many of us may not even see the oneness anymore, or for some, perhaps we see less individuality, I don't know.

I do know that there is much more to God than I think. We believe in one God. We are monotheistic. And yet we also believe this God became human, became one of us, and as Eugene Peterson puts it in the Message, he moved into the neighborhood. Now as soon as this becomes a reality, our philosophical and mathematical systems become challenged. We say to ourselves, if there are two or three, there isn't one anymore. But the Scripture makes it clear there is only one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Read any reliable translation of the Gospel of John and you simply come up with that reality. Jesus shows us the Father. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' presence with us. The Father loves us, calls us by name, sustains us and cares for us.

There continues to be problems in many of our experiences with our earthly fathers, whether they were there, whether they were not there, whether they acted responsibly, whether they didn't act responsibly. There's been a lot of criticism of fathers in the last few decades, whether that's tied to gender or

feminist studies, I don't know. I do know many are once again affirming the place of the father in the family, in the nurturing of children, of the masculine in society, in a relatively fatherless and anti-father age, fathers are being re-discovered. It sounds strange to my ears. But many of us have much healing to do around the reality and experience of our fathers. That's okay and that's a good thing to do, seeking the reality of our past that we carry inside and seeking God's fathering or re-fathering of us as we seek our true identities in Christ. The father in our lives gives us identity as we pull away from mother in the earliest part of our experience. What he has been like in our lives profoundly influences us, for better and for worse. Many of us also have much healing to do around our experience of our mothers as well, but that discussion is for a different day.

The Father God is pictured as the one in the garden, shaping a vessel of clay and from this making all the intricacies of the human body, and then also making a complementary vessel which is different and wonderful as well. There are many playful and wonderfully artistic sections of the Bible; perhaps none so much as the first book and the first two chapters. There we find that the world and the universe and all the major players in our existence are neither random nor fluky. They come from the hand of a loving God who has gone to great lengths to invite you, to love you into relationship with himself. This heavenly Father is the One who wants to give us an identity that lasts, an identity that provides peace, security, fulfillment and wonder.

Right from the beginning, God wanted the best for us, but did not force us to go His way. The rest we call human history, with all its beauty, with all its horror.

I wish I could express to you all the beauty we saw in so many churches in Malta, where Paul was shipwrecked, where Mary, Jesus' mother is studied and even venerated, certainly more than most of us would. Or I wish I could express the worship and beauty of seeing a man and a woman that we have known since they were babies get married to the love of their lives. These were powerful moments of praise to God, dedication to God and one another, the mystery of two becoming one.

On this day, Trinity Sunday, we humble ourselves before God once more. We have another of those core moments, when we say to God, "You made this life. You made the way to eternal life. I trust you. I choose your way."

And we re-align ourselves with the original shape of the universe, where all was in harmony with the Lord.

On this day, we invite you to Jesus' table where we remember his giving up his life for us to have life. We remember he gave up his power, authority and riches of that community we call Trinity, one God, three persons, forever whole and complete, the fountain of health, the wellspring of the Universe. Every healthy community, friendship and love dimly mirrors that Trinity relationship that He gave up. He gave that up, and comes to each one of us with such love in his eyes. He says, "Come. All is prepared." This is the place of peace. This is the place of centeredness.

Of course, none of us are forced to come. Some of us have doubts. Some of us need to say to the Lord, "I believe, help me overcome my unbelief, through your grace." And if we cannot come in good conscience, or if we are not sure we are in good relationship with God and have clearly said "yes" to Jesus, then we can refrain and not be ashamed. Rather, we can take time to investigate what is going on inside. Then we can talk with others and be sure we can receive the peace that passes understanding. This does not flow from our mathematical abilities or scientific prowess, or any accomplishment or ability that we have. It flows from receiving the precious gift of our Lord.

All of the Scriptures today are invitations. There is invitation to baptism, an invitation to follow the Lord in discipleship. There is an invitation to meditate on the greatness and wonder of our God. There is an invitation to remember the blessing that I say almost every week from the end of 2 Corinthians, where we hear the words: grace, love, fellowship/friendship... probably what we need most in life.

And so we are invited to come. Let us be thankful.

Let us pray.