



Sermon for Trinity Sunday, June 7th, 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Genesis 1:1-2:4a](#)

[Psalms 8](#)

[2 Corinthians 13:11-13](#)

[Matthew 28:16-20](#)

What a time, friends. What a time we are living in and living through.

Is this a time we can live into and not just live through? Is this a time we can live and give of our selves, and not just survive? Can we put ourselves into the world around us in whatever ways we can?

Today is your day to live. Not tomorrow. Not once this season and time of distress passes. Not the future. Today is what you have, to live and to give.

Today, in this first week of June, is Trinity Sunday.

I could go off into great mystical musings about God the Holy Trinity, the One God who is three in nature yet always one. Distinct, yet interwoven and always in such full communion that there cannot be one without all three. I could talk about things we know being distinct things at the same time – like how light is both particle and wave. I could share with you the amazing conversation I had with an Orthodox Rabbi last Fall, about Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Because, these brief segments in the New Testament that mention all three of the Trinity together – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – open a lot for us to unpack and explore. Like a box we open to find treasures inside, only to find that the box is bigger on the inside and keeps getting bigger the more we explore. So, I could go off in this direction.

But...

In light of all that is going on around us, I can't. In a world torn apart in great distress even as it is also grappling with a pandemic that continues to claim lives around the world and especially in this country, the musings about the nature of God seem strangely remote.

There, friends, is the juxtaposition we feel today. Today, Trinity Sunday marks a culmination in how we Christians understand the ways God has revealed himself to humanity. But today, we find ourselves trying to get our bearings in a world that seems to be unravelling all around us. That's where we find ourselves today – looking to God in all of God's fullness of being, and seeing ourselves in our incredible brokenness. God who is in full and everlasting unity, and we who keep leaping into discord and disunity. God who is Creator, Savior, and Stream of all life, bonded together in full and

complete communion, and we who break communion and avoid forming bonds with one another, and who cannot even find harmony between the different parts of ourselves.

I have been reading Elie Wiesel's *Night*. It was a book assigned to my middle school child, who asked me to read it as well. I had never read Wiesel's account of the terrors of Auschwitz and the forced march of Jews into such places of horror and inevitable, calculated death. I am gripped by the ability of humans to descend into absolute evil. It was here, at the brink of the furnaces of Auschwitz, that Wiesel was gripped by God's absence. He wrote, "Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust" (p. 43).

Yesterday, I read thoroughly the last words of George Floyd in moments he was pressed to the ground by police and the breath of life was slowly, methodically, eliminated from him. "It's my face, man." "I didn't do nothing serious, man." "I can't breathe." "Please." "They gon' kill me." "Mama. Mama." "I'm through. I'm through." "Please, I can't breathe." This is a sample of what he kept trying to say as his lungs and throat were pressed relentlessly. I wept when reading these. Do you recognize in these words something similar that comes up in our scriptures? Do you see similarities to what Jesus said while dying a death of asphyxiation and displayed humiliation on a cross?

Thursday evening, I walked down Sherman Avenue in this city of Coeur d'Alene. Here I was, a singular priest, pastor, walking down the city blocks where the sidewalks were lined shop to shop and corner to corner with men (and one woman) armed to the teeth with big guns. This was a response from people across north Idaho coming to protect property, with readiness to respond far beyond an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. There was in this response a readiness to enact protection of property even if it cost lives – a readiness to respond with blood for a broken window. Many in town indicated they felt safer because of this show of force. And many also indicated they felt much less safe because of this display. I cannot help but think of Jesus' words to his disciples on the night he was taken by soldiers: "Put your sword back into its sheath. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

I find myself full of uncertainty about how to respond.

But I must respond. And we must respond.

The disciples met Jesus on the mountain before he ascended. In Matthew, it says that they worshipped him, and some doubted. Actually, the Greek word here was not doubting like unbelief. The word literally means "two stances" or "two places of standing." So, it means wavering, vacillating, uncertain. Even after Jesus, resurrection, as he is about to leave the ongoing journey of ministry to his followers, some vacillated.

We are that way. There seems to be a continuum between "true believers" who worship what they see, and waverers and even skeptics who remain uncertain.

In times like these, I can be uncertain. In times like these, I can waver. I can vacillate.

Jesus sets all of that aside. He doesn't care whether you are a diehard all-in "true believer" or someone with a lot of doubts. He cares that he has claimed you and is in relationship with you. And he calls you off your knees, he calls you out of your head. He calls you on the road with him. Jesus commissions all of us – regardless of how we feel or what we think at this moment.

To each of us, as he said then to his disciples, he says now – Go. Make Disciples. Baptize. Teach.

And he says, Remember. Remember that I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

It is this remembering that Jesus is with us that encourages us and gives us the courage to go out and serve, to go out and speak God's good news, and to go out and call people to a better way.

In *Stride toward Freedom*, Martin Luther King, Jr., talked about the hesitancy of his fellow black pastors in Montgomery. They stood apart from the unrest and injustice, believing that they "were not supposed to get mixed up in such earthly, temporal matters" (p. 22). But Martin held a bigger, less constrained view of true religion. He said, "Religion deals with both earth and heaven...On the one hand it seeks to change the souls of men, and thereby unite them with God; on the other hand it seeks to change the environmental conditions of men so that the soul will have a chance after it is changed. Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion. Such a religion is the kind the Marxists like to see—an opiate of the people" (p. 23).

Friends, God calls us to live into this world – not just to live through it and endure it. We who follow Jesus can trust that Jesus is with us, that the Holy Spirit goes before us, that God the Father is Lord of all. And so we can have courage to speak. We can call or write to our city leaders and state legislators and senators, to name what we see as wrong and to call for them to help chart a better way. We can speak with our neighbors and family members, inviting them to see with Jesus' eyes. We can pray, always and everywhere. We can take steps to form bonds and begin relationships with people we have not known, across the divides of race and class and age.

And maybe this is the most important part of all that we are called to do: we dare to form and strengthen relationships, even with people with whom we disagree. Calling someone to account is the beginning of a relationship and opens space for a conversation to continue.

Maybe it is only as we find that we truly do depend upon and need one another, across all people in the world and in our communities, that we will begin to discover what it means to be created in the image of the Triune God, who is forever in complete communion and unity.

We will only discover the deep truth about ourselves, creatures in the image of God, if we begin to take that risk.