

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

May 30, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

Romans 8:12-17

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Prayer & Sermon

*God of love and new life,
Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

Today, being the Sunday after Pentecost is the day in the church year that we particularly recognize that our God is Triune, or Three-in-one, one divinity with three persons. We recognize this on this Sunday because Pentecost wraps up the long season of church holidays from Advent through Easter, and during those holidays we tend to really focus on the Father, Son, and Spirit individually as separate entities. We focus a lot on Jesus and the Father through Christmas and Easter, and Pentecost is all about the Spirit. So, it is important that we balance that out and remind ourselves that our God is one God, one divinity, and that the three persons are not each gods or acting completely independently of the others; while our God is also not just one presence wearing different masks or hats to perform different functions. It is confusing and what we should believe and teach on it has been debated plenty over the centuries, but it is still important for us to take some time together thinking about the big, mysterious, amazing things about our God. That is what today is all about.

When I think about the trinity these days, one of the first things that comes to mind is an inside joke from seminary. It started from what could have been a forgettable tangent while talking about the Trinity in my Intro to Theology class. This professor had a knack for throwing in wacky examples and side stories into her jam packed lectures, probably to give us all a moment to breath. During her discussion on the complexities of the Trinity and the ways we try to understand it, she made an offhand comment about how some use rabbits in their symbolism of the trinity and how that one has particular meaning for her as her daughters have pet rabbits and she finds that Rabbits can symbolize a lot about God, "Bunny Theology." She called it. Most of us in the class understood well enough what she was on about and knew her well enough to know not to dwell on the parts that didn't quite make sense as the tangent wasn't the most crucial part of the lecture to understand. But alas, it really tripped up one of my classmates, and he could not stop wondering what it meant, but knew it wasn't important enough to ask the professor. Throughout the rest of the semester he would randomly bring it up and ask us, his classmates, if we understood it. As I said, none of us had fully remembered all she said about it because it hadn't seemed important, so none of us could give him an answer, except assure him that it really did not matter. But he couldn't let it go. Every time for the next 3 years that someone mentioned this professor, he would bring up that he STILL doesn't understand what Bunny Theology is. Bunny theology became a bit of an inside joke to those in my year at seminary.

This story comes to mind whenever I think about the Trinity now, so of course it was not far from my mind this week as I prepared for Trinity Sunday worship. So, it was all too perfect when Mitzi came into my office on Wednesday and said, "Hey, this may be random to give out... but I got a bunch of these chocolate bunnies from the Young Life fundraiser. Is there a fun way to give them out at church?" Bunny theology on the brain and here materializes a whole bunch of bunnies! So, it seemed like perfect timing. Before we randomly gave out chocolate bunnies a couple months after Easter, I figured it would be best to figure out where my professors comments started from, what did rabbits have to do with the trinity? So I googled it! And lo and behold, one of the oldest and most widely used religious symbols is of three running rabbits, running in a circle or forming a triangle, all with their heads to the middle, close enough that the rabbits share three ears. The three ears make a triangle with the meeting points being where the ears attach to the heads. So each rabbit looks like it has 2 ears, but each ear is attached to 2 rabbits. Though this image has been used in many religions around the world, when Christians came upon it, they appreciated the way that it symbolizes the trinity, our three-in-one God. Each person of the trinity being their own presence, but as the rabbits share the ears, the three persons of the trinity share the same divinity and cannot exist apart from the others. To those who really dig into the specifics of the theology of the trinity, the image or analogy is not perfect, but it remains an iconic image that reminds us of some of the important things to remember about our Triune God. So as I had my classmate bringing up my professor's bunny theology comment reminding me of the silly ways we try to explain the complexities of the trinity, I invite you to take one of the chocolate bunnies today to remind you of our Triune God, or maybe just bring a smile to your face or some chocolate to enjoy to keep your brain from working too hard trying to fully understand the Trinity. You see, that's the thing. Just like my classmate never resolved his desire to fully understand what my professor was talking about, when it

comes to the trinity, the reality is that none of us can fully understand the mysteries of how the Trinity works and any way we try to describe it will fall short, because we have nothing that compares here on earth.

So if we can't do it anyway, what's the point of talking about the trinity at all? Well, our God being Triune is not just some cool feature of our God, a fun fact, or something meant to make our heads explode the more we think about it and get confused. There are some important things to learn about God and God's hopes for us in God's triune nature. One of the biggest things that I learned for the first time from many of my seminary classes is that our God being three-in-one is an example of perfect relationship. Our God is inherently communal, it is in God's nature to be relationship, God is relationship. Our God in three persons who share the same divinity and work together seamlessly to love all people by being love within Godself and being love in the world. We are called to reflect God's love, live out Jesus's way of life, and accept the Spirit's guidance, and because our God is communal we know that we can look to God for how we are meant to love and be in relationship with each other.

Our part in this relationship with God is highlighted for us in the passage we read from Romans 8 as Paul teaches about God's Spirit Family. Verses 14-17 tell of our adoption into God's family through the Spirit. A reminder of what those verses say:

“14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

Paul uses the metaphor of adoption to explain how we are welcomed into God's family. God the Father welcomes us to be heirs with Christ through the Spirit. All three persons of the Trinity are part of making us family. Adoption is an important metaphor because it reminds us that we do not need to be of a specific blood line or have a specific name or have a specific birth family to be welcomed fully into God's family. And this adoption is not a welcoming into a second class status, but we are adopted into the family to join Christ as heirs of the Kingdom of God. God so loves us and values relationship with us so much that God welcomes us into the Divine relationship of the trinity with equal worth. Adoption back when Paul wrote this letter to the people of Rome, was an important process that was used to pass on honor, wealth and status to a chosen person. It could be an amazing ticket to the good life for someone with less, but also held political and social power. So, Paul telling the people that God adopts us into the family is no small claim nor just a lovey dovey welcome to the family. Paul is telling us readers that God is adopting us to be heirs alongside Christ. Obviously we are not made divine with that adoption, but as any adopted child we gain all rights, responsibilities, and privileges of being part of the family. This means that we are given the same love and care AND are expected to live out the God family values or God's Kingdom values. As we are reminded by focusing on the Trinity, the Kingdom values are centered around love and relationship.

Paul also reminds us in this short passage in Romans that becoming part of God's family does give us responsibilities to take on, but just as each person of the trinity is never alone, we are never left alone in our walk. As we are adopted into God's family we are promised that we are not in it alone, we are brought into the life of the Triune God, where we are love, secure, and empowered by God's Spirit. It is through that love, security, and empowerment that we are able to reflect Christ in our daily life. Being in relationship with God, being part of God's family will always be a reciprocal relationship, a relationship that has both give and take, a relationship in which both sides pour into each other and respond. As we are welcome into this loving relationship with God, we are also to live out this kind of relationship with those around us. We should aim for healthy relationships grounded in love and equitable give and take, perhaps not always the same give and take or an equal return all the time, but all peoples have something they can give just as all need relationship to thrive. Let us also remember that as God adopts all, not just those historically considered God's people, we are also called to love on and be in relationship to all people, even those that we would consider "other" or not part of our family. As we are adopted into the loving relationship share by our Triune God, let us adopt each other in that same love.

For our prayer today, I will be sharing a trinitarian prayer by Saint Francis of Assisi who wrote this in the 13th Century and so these words have been shared by God's family for generations. Let us pray:

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,
Grant us in our misery the grace to do for you alone.
What we know you want us to do,
And always to desire what pleases you.
Thus, inwardly cleansed, inwardly enlightened,
And inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,
May we be able to follow in the footprints of your beloved Son,
Our Lord Jesus Christ.
And by your grace alone, may we make our way to you,
Most High, who live and rule in perfect Trinity and
Simple Unity
And are glorified,
God all-powerful, forever and ever. Amen.