
Relationships Matter to God

A sermon by the Rev. Deacon Salmoon Bashir
The First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday – Year A

If there is anything we need in our lives it is the power of Relationships! Relationships matter to God!

Today in the Christian calendar, we celebrate Trinity Sunday. We celebrate God who is one in three and God who is three in one. We celebrate the Trinity which is the core of Christian faith. The gospel today is one of the rare occasions when all three persons of the triune God are named in the same verse, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The one God we worship in three persons. Three distinct persons and equal in holiness.

One of my seminary professors used to joke that if someone asked him questions particularly about trinitarian theology, his reply was always “It’s a mystery”! However, the triune God gives us the perfect model of relationship, perfection of giving and receiving in love.

Some of you probably remember in the gospel of John how Jesus reflects on this perfect relationship, this perfect unity that exists between the Trinity. Jesus prays to the Father for the disciples and for us to experience the same relationship that he has with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The relationship of perfect unity between the trinity matters because relationship matters to God! The perfection of love between them is the one God that we celebrate in the Trinity. The Father loves the Son and speaks to Him. The Son loves the Father and prays to Him. The Father and the Son together breathe the Holy Spirit. All, in different and diverse ways, reflect the love that exemplifies their relationship. The loving relationship which stretches from even before the foundation of the cosmos into eternity, out of which the world is born. God revealed Himself as creation’s Creator, revealed Himself in Jesus Christ in His birth, death and resurrection, and then again in the dwelling of Holy Spirit among us. These revelations tell us about the kind of relationship the Trinity has. That model of unity, that perfection of love is what Jesus prayed for, for His disciples and then the same prayer for each one of us.

The heart of Christian faith is to be in relationship and in today’s gospel Jesus calls us to become a beloved community where relationships matter. You probably remember last week’s celebration of baptism and that this sacrament always requires a community of people, at least two people where one is being baptized and the other one is the baptizer. It creates a relationship through the pouring out of the water and receiving of that water, it requires a relationship. We see that in the baptism of Jesus himself in the river Jordan, the heavenly communal relationship is revealed, we hear the voice of the Father from heaven, and we see the Spirit descending on Him like a dove.

Now you are probably thinking – Great! We believe in one God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but what difference does it make for us if we talk about it or not. Why does it matter to us?

Well, it does matter, and it does make a difference in our lives. Christian belief in the Trinity is not merely some philosophical or theoretical doctrine. The relationship God has within the Trinity, God wants to share that relationship with us. God wants **us** to have the same experience of joy, love and koinonia of being in the very relationship with one another that He exists in. This is why it matters!

This is a **HARD** task, but it is worth it. Relationships matter to God. This makes relationships one of the most important things we have in our lives. And this explains why we endure the painful mess and do hard, heartfelt work to keep these relationships. When you need some extra motivation to do your part, imagine what God would do in your situation. And we know the answer to that – God will pursue us to the end of existence. The Father even gave His Son Jesus over to be tortured and crucified to repair our broken relationship with God. It

was that relationship of love for us that we just celebrated on the feast of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit descended upon us to be our partner and co-laborer in this relationship with the triune God and with each other.

Let me share a story with you all of what it means to be in a communal, loving relationship. Growing up in Pakistan I have seen and experienced a lot of moments of religious intolerance but today, let me share a story where I have seen what it means when people come together and become members of one another. When the power of relationship and love overcame the power of division and hate. One of my father's friends who was a Muslim had a heart to support Christian families struggling with food insecurity in a village near my hometown in Pakistan. Every year his goal was to raise money for enough food and groceries to help at least 50 families particularly during the Christmas and Easter seasons so people could have food on their tables at least on these feast days. He did this year after year, and that sharing of love which he started on his own, brought people of that village so much closer to one another. That communal love and relationship manifested in different ways, especially when the security situation in Pakistan was not that great in the early 2000's. The relationship of giving and receiving took a huge turn at that time when every week churches, mosques and other places of worship were under attack, when people were thinking twice before going to their places of worship. On Sundays the young people from the Muslim community were providing security services as volunteers to their Christian neighbors so that they could worship inside the Church safely. On Fridays, the Christian community in that village volunteered to provide security around the mosques so their Muslim neighbors could safely offer the Friday prayers.

With all the extremism, intolerance and persecution of religious minorities that still exists in the country, this community showed many what it means to have loving and caring relationships with one another even in the most difficult times. What it means to give and receive in love. They taught many what it means to be members of one another and sharing lives with one another and how to be in loving relationship with those with whom God called us to be in communion. You and I were designed for relationships. We are designed to have a relationship with God and we are designed to have a relationship with each other. More than ever now is the time when we need to have closer relationships of giving and receiving, to be members of one another, and to love each other as members of the body of Christ, as a Church.

Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith, a well-known theologian, in one of her articles talks about Ubuntu philosophy which encourages a community instead of individualism. Ubuntu refers to behaving well towards others or acting in ways that benefit the community and building relationships "**I am because we are.**" I am because of this koinonia, because of this shared community that has a deep sense of love, joy, participation, receiving and giving. Jesus calls us to be in those relationships with our brothers and sisters because our triune God cares about relationships.

As Christians in our baptism, we affirm our faith in the triune God and become part of that holy union. The call today on this Trinity Sunday is to build our lives around mutual, loving relationships, to follow the model of the Trinity where there is perfect love, perfect unity, and perfect relationship. We might not have to explain or understand the concept of the Trinity and just call it mystery which is beyond our human imagination and intellect.

The whole mystery of one in three and three in one – perhaps, we can explore and experience this mystery through the loving relationship of life-giving God and through that, we can also experience this messy but loving, life-giving and uniting relationship with one another.

My prayer today is that we share the same joy, love, and unity as our Triune God in creating relationships with one another, and that we grow in grace, love, and communion through the power of the same God. **Amen!**