



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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Poland, Ohio 44514
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Trinity Sunday

2 Cor. 13:11-13

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

The Dance of the Trinity

Most preachers don't like to preach on Trinity Sunday. How do I know this? For most of my preaching ministry I have been an associate or seminarian or intern, so I know this because Sr. Pastors have always given me Trinity Sunday on which to preach, so it must be that they would rather not preach on this Sunday if given a choice. In my early preaching my understanding of the Trinity was limited. I related to the worship committee that I once brought in a bucket of Neapolitan ice cream to illustrate the Trinity and they seized upon the idea of Neapolitan ice cream cups which we couldn't find but instead settled on tri-colored bomb pops – available at the door as you leave. Today is also Father's Day and we have not forgotten our fathers. Not to be outdone by our Christian Education mother's day gift of carnations, we have car wash coupons for our fathers for August 2 when the youth will have a car wash.

But to get back to the Neapolitan ice cream concept of the Trinity, this is a somewhat incorrect understanding. It is easy to think of God in three persons as split up into thirds. But this isn't it. We might think God just puts on different hats at different times and disguises as three different personalities. But God is not a split personality. Nor is God three separate persons, but one unified person. We are not polytheistic but monotheistic and this is what is difficult to understand.

In this reading from 2 Corinthians we find one of the few references to the triune nature of God. In this reading we hear the threefold attributes of God as grace, love, and communion. You may often hear the Trinity referred to as creator, redeemer, and sustainer, or in the use of several other adjectives. I like grace, love, and communion because it describes the three persons of the Trinity in relational terms.

One way that theologians have described the Trinity over the last two thousand years is with the word perichoresis which mean “go around” or in language we better understand, the divine dance of love. The way we envision

God colors the way we relate to one another as Christians. If we think of God as a single divine dictator we will become people who are dictators, harsh, cold, and critical – short on love and joyless. But if we understand the three persons of the trinity as intimately joined together in joyful relationship, in this divine dance of love, we will become a joyful and loving community as well.

One of the things that gives me the most joy in life is dancing. But I have never been very good at it. As part of my college major in performing arts I took three semesters of modern dance but my body just wouldn't stretch in the right ways. Later in life I took a ballroom dancing course, but again I was clumsy at it. Then I was introduced to contra dancing and here was a dance that even I could do. I fell in love with it. Contra dancing originated with 17th century English country dances. Today contra dances are held across the country with live bands consisting of various instruments, but always fiddles. Dancers dress in a wide array of colorful clothing and even kilts are sometimes worn. When I lived in Washington we had a wonderful old amusement park from the turn of the century – Glen Echo Park – that was home to a large hall called the Spanish Ballroom. There were contra dances there three nights a week as well as country waltzing, salsa, and swing dances. Contra dancing is like square dancing except the squares progress so that you are dancing with different partners and there is an energy in the dance as partner swing, chain across, and circle round. When viewed from above, the dance makes an enchanting pattern of movement. In fact, you really have to see contra dancing for yourself to get the full picture, so here is a link to a dance in Tacoma, Washington. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1cPyJWm-g4&index=8&list=RDjcYOIXIMfJQ>

The dance of the Trinity is a lot like contra dancing. As you could see, there is a constant give and take to dancing. A hand is extended and another hand receives it, then hands are dropped and the action is repeated around the circle. If one part of the dance is missed, it is difficult for the sequence to continue. You might find that the hand extended to yours is warm and sweaty or cold and clammy, but it doesn't matter, because all the hands are part of the whole. Hands brush other hands unknown and yet the dance goes on. And there is a joyful energy that is apparent between the dancers. First the circle moves one way with Father moving toward the Son, the Son moving toward the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit moving toward God. Then the direction reverses and Spirit moves toward the Son, the Son toward the Father and the Father toward the Spirit.

The divine perichoresis of the Trinity is a dance of love. The three persons of God are one in unity, not pitted against one another. They constantly give from one to the other as well as receive, with outstretched hands. They are totally in sync, and become more than three distinct personalities. The three persons of the Trinity

are completely interrelated and inter dependent. As the dance gains momentum their energy draws them together as the threads of a rich tapestry are woven together.

And God reaches out and takes our hands as well and pulls us into the dance. This is the way we are to live in relationship to God and to one another, as a holy community. We cannot build a community by refusing to touch one another in some way because we don't like sweaty hands. We cannot stay isolated in our own private world, but are called out of isolation to interact with one another. It may be a long eight count swing where we get to know each other well or it may be a two count dos e do where only our eyes meet and we move on to embrace another. But no matter the depth of our interaction – whether a quick hello after worship, a long phone call, or a relationship of trust that develops in a small group, the people of this community are given a model in the Trinity of the meaning of agape love – the model of a community in relationship with one another.

Sometimes sin takes us out of the dance, causing us to miss a beat or step on another's feet or fail to extend a hand but grace restores us to the rhythm again. Sometimes we go through the motions of our Christian life and we forget how to dance. We forget just how our feet are supposed to move or when to extend a hand or how to whirl around without losing our balance. We move stiffly and tentatively or stay safe on the sidelines watching. The dance of the community of believers is open to all of us to participate. When we leave our fear on the sideline and step into the circle we find that others all around us are holding us up. In a contra dance beginners often wear a special pin to identify themselves. More experienced dancers, seeing that pin, take extra care, sometimes pushing and pulling the new dancers in the right direction, stepping in to keep the dance moving even when mistakes are made. That is how it should be in our community. In some ways we are all new dancers. We are just beginning to taste the joy of the dance. But with continued practice it will come. Thanks be to God for giving us the Trinity to show us how to dance the divine dance of love.