

Trinity Sunday 2020 (Preached online to the Archdeaconry of Labrador)

Good morning. I speak to you on this Trinity Sunday as we gather to celebrate our faith and share in worship. I regret very much that we are unable to be together in person and I ask everyone to hold firm until all the familiar and much-loved activities of church life resume. I thank everyone from the Parishes of Labrador West, Churchill Falls, Lake Melville, St. Timothy's in Rigolet and Southeast Labrador for your continued faithfulness during this very strange time. You have risen to the challenge of offering worship online every week and I know that pastoral care continues. On this Sunday we continue to pray for everyone affected in any way by COVID-19. It is rather ironic that I am with you in this way because on this particular Sunday I would have been with you in person for Confirmation in Labrador City followed by a visit to Churchill Falls and then on to Goose Bay and Rigolet. That visit is postponed, however, as soon as we are able to travel and gather for public worship my first priority will be to return to Labrador and I hope to come for a good long visit.

Everyone is using the term "social distancing" frequently and casually today, however, "social distancing" might take on an entirely new meaning in the Big Land. Vast distances between neighbors requiring considerable time to cover are very much part of life in Labrador. You knew all about "social distancing" long before the rest of the world discovered the term. And even with new ways of travel in recent years like highways and airplanes Labrador is still very much a place of wide-open spaces, and strong independent people with a deep relationship to the land and to each other ... no matter how far apart they sometimes are.

And so, in Labrador, while vast geographical distances are a common feature of life, to be truly isolated is not a common feature of life, for you have always looked out for each other, and the people of Labrador know the meaning of the word community. I am grateful that the clergy and others in our Labrador church have weathered this storm so well and I commend everyone for the way in which you have all kept in touch. I know that tomorrow, Monday, the clergy are sharing in another one of their regular conference calls together. They too know the meaning of the word community.

But on this Trinity Sunday, we are challenged to think about a different kind of community, the unity of the Holy Trinity as Christians celebrate the sacred mystery of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

Often referred to as "God in three persons," there is little doubt that the Holy Trinity can be one of the most mysterious of all Christian teachings. Although the word "Trinity" cannot be found in the Bible anywhere, the idea of the Trinity fills our scriptures:

- God the Father is seen in the Creator, through whom all things were made;
- God the Son is seen in Jesus Christ, through whom God revealed Himself fully in human form;
- God the Holy Spirit is seen in the Spirit of Pentecost, through whom Christians receive the gifts and strength they need to serve God in this life.

Christians often ask, "How? ... How can one God be three separate persons at the same time?" One of the most helpful solutions to this great question is to think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three aspects of the same God who chooses to reveal Himself in different ways under different circumstances.

It's a little like this: my grandmother had three names. To me she was Gran. To my mother she was Mom. To her husband she was Bessie. The same person always, but known in such different ways to different people in her life. God too is revealed in different ways.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is one of those incredible parts of our faith that reminds us of the limits of our understanding while tantalizing us with the promise of a God who is not only greater than we imagine, but greater than we *can* imagine. It is a mystery that does not end in this life, but which compels us to seek its ending beyond this life, in God.

A funny thing about the Holy Trinity is that Jesus never used the word Trinity, even if he did talk about his Heavenly Father and also promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come. The closest Holy Scripture comes to the Holy Trinity is at the end of Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus is quoted as telling his disciples to go into all the world, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There is evidence to suggest, however, that baptism for the first Christians would not have been in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit at all ... but simply in the name of Jesus.

In the centuries since Jesus walked among us, we have developed elaborate ways of thinking about his message and sometimes made it pretty complicated. But the message of Jesus was actually pretty simple ... something about loving God with your heart and your soul and your mind and your strength and loving your neighbour as yourself. Jesus asked people to follow him and become learners and disciples. Christianity was a much simpler endeavor in the beginning, and I wonder if what is most needed today is a return to a humbler faith. Maybe that is what is happening to us during this time of pandemic.

I have spoken of the mystery of the Holy Trinity today but perhaps we find ourselves in the middle of another kind of mystery right now, as everything changes right before our eyes.

We have lost so much of late that was familiar in life and discovered that lots of the things we thought we needed we didn't need at all. In losing some things we have gained other things: Like time with each other. Like the joy of cooking a meal together. Like long days out on the land. Like the peace of a simpler life.

We have lost so much of late that was familiar in our church life, and in the midst of it have discovered new ways of being the church. All of the telephone calls and emails and other ways in which we are keeping in touch, and the incredible amount of livestreaming that we're doing with our worship and prayers these days, have actually brought new life to our church. And I wonder what more may still be in store for us to discover.

In our churches we have had to put aside so much we thought we needed and, in the process, discovered so much we truly needed. Whether we ever understand the Holy Trinity, much less believe it, might not be nearly so important as whether we understand and believe in Jesus. For it is Jesus we truly need.

On this Holy Trinity Sunday we celebrate the mystery of the blessed Trinity but let us do that knowing that we are also in the midst of another kind of mystery today that continues to be revealed among us. I think the end of that mystery will be a simpler church that understands what is truly important and lives it more deeply, a church that reflects the love of The One who so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in him shall not die but have eternal life.

And so, my friends, my brothers and sisters of Labrador, I send you great love on this day. We may be separated by many miles but we are close to one another in our Lord and Saviour who brings us together in this life and promises to embrace us forever in the life to come.

I end with the words of that wonderful old hymn for Trinity Sunday we just sang (Hymn #1):

*Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty,
God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity!*