

*Keep the Window Open*  
 John 3:1-17 ~ Romans 8:12-17  
 Trinity Sunday ~ May 25, 2018 (Memorial Day Sunday)  
 The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

***Introduction to Scripture***

In the year that Jesus began his walking, talking, teaching, healing, inviting, *relational* ministry on this earth of ours, a man named Nicodemus visited him in the night. Nicodemus was a religious leader who was respected and righteous. He came with an urgent question and left, with perhaps even more questions. You will notice a rather intense exchange—I'm not sure you would call it a conversation. See what you think.

***Sermon***

This happened in a three-generation family, where the grandfather, son, and four-year-old grandson were all named John. One day the phone rang (this was before cell phones were invented).

"Hello?" said one of the women in the household.

"May I speak to John, please?"

"Which John would you like to speak to? John the father, John the son, or John the holy terror?"

I guess they had a certain kind of trinity going on within their household. Truth is, preaching on the Trinity produces a kind of holy terror for most preachers. We'd much rather preach on a great story, like Moses encountering the burning bush, or one of Jesus' marvelous parables, like the "The Good Samaritan." And I'm guessing when you saw that it was "Trinity Sunday" you thought either, "What's that again?" Or, "Oh no, not that again."

Today is a unique "holy day" in our Christian tradition. All of our other Christian holy days and season are set aside to remember, ponder and celebrate an event in the life of Christ, like Advent, the birth and the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, or Lent and the events of Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. We just celebrated Pentecost last Sunday: Wearing red, holding pinwheels, remembering the mysterious wind and fire, and the Holy Spirit the birthing of the Christian church. But today, we get to ponder and celebrate... a doctrine. Now isn't that exciting! You may be saying, "Give me angels or give me the benediction, please." Why didn't I go to the Brewers game today? (Their bats were unbelievable yesterday!)

It's also Memorial Day weekend, the unofficial beginning of summer, (obviously I wrote this sermon title, "Keep the Window Open," before the mosquitoes and the humidity arrived in full force). School is out on Friday and this Sunday we're supposed to get excited about a doctrine? Why now? Why have we been observing the first Sunday after Pentecost as Trinity Sunday since 1,000 CE?

And more to the point, what is there to remember, ponder and celebrate about the Trinity for us, today?

Today is the day to remember, ponder, and celebrate the composite of all these stories that add up to and beyond the truth that our God, our Awesome God, **is relational**. Like any human relationship, God cannot be contained or controlled or fully known or explained. Praise be to God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Rock, Cornerstone and Temple who creates, redeems, and sustains all of creation. Who God is and what God does is at the core, relational. Do you long to experience a healthy, life-giving, sustaining relationship? God gave us Jesus to show us how God does it in human form. But how often and for how long do we, like Nicodemus, walk away, blown away by what Jesus is trying to teach us? (Dare I say Jesus puts the “try” in Triune God?)

Here’s what makes the relational nature of God particularly crucial right now: I think we have a relational crisis brewing in our country. If you think about it—Whether it’s the weekly revelations the #MeToo Movement continues to expose about toxic behavior of yet another celebrity; or if it’s the almost “where now?” punch in our guts as the epidemic of school shootings continues; or if it’s the “gamesmanship” of international diplomacy with the Korean Peninsula or the Middle East: the hurt, the heart ache, the potential threats to the core of our society and even to global security—all stem from relationships gone bad. Or relationships that were never good to begin with. Or relationships that have been abused, neglected, or disregarded. As we are called to think about our nation on Memorial Day weekend, and remember with gratitude, the sacrifices of our men and women who have given their lives to protect the freedom and restore peace to our nation and world, I hear God’s call to preach and practice Trinity with all our might and muster. What do I mean? As Dr. Karoline Lewis, Preaching professor at Luther College, puts it: “Trinity insists that relationship is what truly matters, then that becomes the litmus test for what faith looks like in the world.”<sup>i</sup>

Here’s the thing: We like to think we are self-sufficient, in control. Autonomous. Circle the wagons. Close the windows. We know what we know. Just go with that and with people who see it the way we do. Kind of like Nicodemus did when he went to visit Jesus that night. This is anti-Trinitarian thinking. It is binary thinking and it contradicts the nature of our Triune God. In this year of 2018, perhaps we like Nicodemus, are asking Jesus, “What do you mean by this?” Or we look at our country and ask, “How can these things be?” And like Nicodemus, we may not be hearing what Jesus is saying. Like Nicodemus, we may walk away too soon. Like Nicodemus, we may wait too long to act on what we are coming to realize may be true, but afraid to open the window on a new way of living and being. Nicodemus waited too long. We read in John 19:39 that after Jesus was crucified he helped Joseph of Arimathea prepare Jesus’ dead body to be buried with about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloe. Yes, Nicodemus came to see the light of what Jesus was trying to tell him that first night. But it was too late.

What about us? Are we game? When we come together to worship and sing about this “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty” who comes to us, for us, as one of us, wanting to work through us, we are saying, “yes, we are game!” This Lord whose robe had a hem that filled the temple in Isaiah’s prophetic vision, and this same Lord whose rough weave dusty hem was enough to heal the woman with the flow of blood, who reached out in the crowd, believing if she could just touch that hem of Jesus’ garment without him even knowing. And she was healed. Same hem, same God: What she could she see, as she pushed her way through the people, desperately hoping for something she had not seen yet? She let the Holy Spirit push her through the crowd, she let the Sustainer open for her the window of possibility when all hope seemed lost.

What can we see in the crowd of our concerns, yearnings, and fears? What do we *want* to see? Our message today, Trinity Sunday in the year of 2018 is simply this: **Leave the Window Open**. God has more for us to see, more for us to believe, more life-giving work for us to do. Yes, we have more relational work to do. Leave the window open, the window of your heart, the window of our collective FPC heart, to let God’s Spirit lead us into the light of God’s Healing Love and desire to save the world. Step out of the closed window, binary world and into the triune realm of God’s overflowing, redeeming, world-saving love.

Why? Because God wants us to be about something greater than ourselves. God wants to grow us beyond our narrow expectations. God is calling us to develop, to practice relationships that are more than transactional. Sure, it may be a rummage sale customer in our Fellowship Hall next week, a client at Soup or Socks, a political campaign we are working on, or someone we run into the grocery store. But, leave the window open for the Spirit to blow where it will, as She will, to breathe love and life where there is hurt and death. God, through Christ, is calling us to move from our brokenness toward wholeness in how we relate to one another, as a community, as a nation. God is calling us to let God’s spirit in deeper than we have before. God is calling us to embody the love of Christ in ways that are more visible than before.

Let’s be honest: How open is your window right now? Maybe your window is shut like Nicodemus’ was that night. Here’s a question to help you assess how open your window is: What are you planning to do that you cannot possibly achieve without help from beyond yourself? What do you think maybe God is calling you to be and do, right now—that seems impossible without the flame and wind of the Holy Spirit reigniting your life? Opening the window at all is scary. And opening it further than we have before is really scary.

Here’s the thing; If I succeed in scaring you, I’m probably doing my job. As the wisdom in Proverbs 1 tells us: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” And the God we worship is the One who is all about leading us beyond what is familiar and comfortable and manageable into a new way of being, new ways of being church that are beyond what we can see at the moment.

The Bible tells us and our Triune God teaches us: if we know exactly what we will do next; if we can predict and control exactly what our church will do next: we are not letting the Spirit of God lead us. Our Triune God is like a concrete truck: it has to keep turning or else what happens? The concrete hardens in the truck and not where it was meant to go. I remember mixing concrete by hand the summer I spent in Liberia, West Africa in the village of Fahnja. No trucks there, we were mixing it in wheelbarrows and we had to keep moving, keep mixing, or else our wheelbarrow would become spent and useless. With that image, I will close with this : Keep mixing it up with God: Speaker, Word & Breath a.k.a. Sun, Ray & Warmth, yes, also known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If you feel a little Holy Terror, you are probably on the right track. Let's, "leave the window open" and see what God can do!

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"If the Trinity Mattered," Dr. Karoline Lewis, May 18, 2018,  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5156>