

Haydenville Congregational Church, Haydenville MA
Matilda Rose Cantwell
May 30, 2010

“In the Name of the Three”

John 15:26-16:15

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O God, our rock and our redeemer.

You may know that people who worship in churches like this one Built in the architectural style of New England in the 1800s, with white exterior and the looming steeple, those who descended from the Puritan congregational tradition, are sometimes called the *frozen chosen*.

The congregational tradition of which we are a part here in this UCC church, to which we are both related and devoted, was not known for its expressiveness in worship or evangelicalism.

Yet here in this church, we are on our way to becoming a more expressive people. Our minister is Armenian and we are as diverse as any rural New England church could be, praise God, not that we don't have a long way to go to being a beloved community.

And today, we have visitors for the baptism, families and friends from out of town—and we remind ourselves that we are ALL, members and non-members, friends and newcomers—both hoists and guests in this place.

For we are committed to the deeply held belief that we have all been strangers once, and we are all welcome here.

We should strive, in our own way, to BE evangelical.

Contrary to what we have been taught by what we see around us

Evangelical comes from the Greek word ***Evangelion***,

Which simply means Good news.

So this morning I would like to propose some good news.

Something that maybe even we can get evangelical about.

That news is the trinity—that little sign I made on each of the babies foreheads—which is also the sign of the cross—Father, son, and holy ghost or, in more contemporary language—God, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

As if it was not remarkable enough that we baptized three babies,
Born within minutes of each other into the same family,
We are doing so on *Trinity Sunday*, the day that we commemorate the
relationship between what we call father, son and Holy Spirit.

After Pentecost, which is where we were last week, the church year moves to
Trinity Sunday—when Jesus is no longer with the disciples in body, but the
Holy Spirit has descended, And God moves among us in a new way.

This might then be a day when we differentiate ourselves—from the
Unitarians—and lets be honest, many of us are not just coming out as fallen
Catholics...some of us here are fallen Unitarians, if you can believe there is
such a thing--

For we baptize in the name of the three.
And this might be something to be evangelical about.

The doctrine of the trinity—the father, the son and the Holy Spirit—is a
doctrine that many of us Protestants—myself included—sometimes tend to
ignore or pass off. Because it seems too orthodox, too traditional, too
complicated, especially when we use the language of God as father and
Christ as son.

The trinity was never mentioned in the bible, not once.
The idea of the triune God, God in three, is people's response to the mystery of
God. Some describe the trinity as a dance. Some describe it as a way of
imagining the complete and total empathy of god. My seminary teacher, along
with other theologians call the work of the trinity mutual indwelling—its like
when you are so close to someone you can predict their responses, intuit their
moves even before they make them/.

Some describe it as poetry.

Listen to this verse for Hildegard of Bingen:

To the Trinity be praise!

*God is music; God is life
that nurtures every creature in its kind.
Our God is the song of the angel throng
and the splendor of secret ways
hid from all humankind,
But God our life is the life of all.*

The notion of the trinity began to take shape in the first centuries AD,
When church fathers considered the mystery of a person who was so close to
God, *was he the same as God? Was he part of god?*
And of the Holy Spirit that he sent—was that part of God *and* him?
What they came up with, besides being the subject of bitter and ongoing debate
in theological circles—was the idea of a Trinitarian God—*three persons in one*.
As described in things like the Nicene Creed.
It is important to remember though that in Latin, the term *person* does not mean
individual, human being, with a self-conscious ego, how we mean it today.
It referred rather to an entity, —in fact, a part played by an actor—not as a
concealing mask—but a role, a way of being in the world.
As if God takes different roles, through different manifestations.

For Roman Catholics the deeply help practice of crossing oneself in the trinity
in name of the father person and holy ghost, making the shape of a cross, maybe
be an instinctive ritual, whose meaning reverberates deep within in ways we do
not even fully understand, for others it maybe be a source of comfort and solace
but a mystery all the same.

We think of ourselves as monotheists, descended from the children of Abraham
who came to see the profound intervention of one divine source in their life, one
god, rather than a universe made up of golden calves and sometimes capricious
deities who needed to be placated and treated according to their specific
individual wiles.

We are monotheists, but we don't really worship one God.

We worship relationship.

Isn't this good news—something for us to be evangelical about?

This what makes us theologically different

Than our Unitarian neighbors down the street,

With whom we share so much--

Among other things, a belief that we are called,

First and foremost as stewards of God's creation.

Who believes strongly in the balance between the sacredness of tradition and
those who have come before us, AND a progressive, forward thinking theology,

I too was once a Unitarian.

It enabled me to reconcile my pluralistic belief, that all religions are equal, and
that all offer distinct and unique paths to the divine,

All of which are worthy and even enriching for people of faith.

That no religion has a corner on the truth, that reason and the written word are ways to the divine, that God is everywhere, particularly in the beauty and intricacy of gods creation. I am so opposed to the promotion of one religion over another, that I too am sometimes shy
To proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

When people wondering how I went from being a normal, maybe even somewhat cool person to being a Christian pastor,
And ask me something long the lines of –
Do you really believe in that stuff?
If I have to courage and the presence of mind I say—
I believe in relationship.

Fore Jesus was a human being, just like you and me, and had relationships with others, just like me, and a relationship the disciples, his family,
With himself and the created world. None of these relationships were simple or without struggles.

But his relationship with the divine was so close—so close that he intoxicated countless people--whole cultures were created and fallen in his name—
Over thousands of years with the depth and intensity of his relationship.
His relationship with the divine was so close that he experienced God as his father, and showed us through birth and death that that ***relationship*** is the one immortal thing.

And I am not only saying that everything is connected, and I am not only talking about the relationship between us and others.
We also have relationships with the natural world,
With our work, with ourselves.

So Today is a day for us take close look at the meaning of three—three that archetypal sacred number—three in one, and what it means when w talk about the relationship between--when we say in the name of God,
Christ and the Holy Spirit. —
And wonder what it might mean for us—
Together, but also each of us individually.
You----You, believers, and questioners, and questioning believers.

All of us, because friends, there are three actors on the stage of our lives—there is always three. There is 1, ourselves 2, the other, and third,
The thing that comes into being between us.

That thing that, paradoxically, is formed and conceived in life, but continues on,
Blossoming, like wildflowers in June, through death.

Because this is important.

It is important for those of us who call ourselves Christians,

It is important for parents.

It is important for those of us facing hardship

It is important for those of us facing indescribable loss

It is important for all of us.

Because when Jesus is longer, God takes up residence

In the place between us and him

And when friends and loved ones are no longer with us in body

God exists in the space between.

God is still speaking, and each century and each year and each moment and
time and place we struggle to find words and images and ways of describing the
great mystery of what we call God.

The trinity is never mentioned in scripture

But it is in the gospel of John,

In haunting the passage that Maryanne and Carolyn read today, that

We see the notion of the trinity

Begin to take shape

When the advocate comes to you, whom I will send to you from the father

He will testify on my behalf.

Do you ever find yourself, in the middle of your relationship

With someone you have know for two years

And forget for a second

That you have not known them your whole entire life?

For Jesus, *advocate*, another word in Greek for spirit,

Is the entity formed, created,

Dynamic and fluid, ever changing

Yet immortal and immutable all at once.

Once there, never gone, Once there

Its impact will live forever

Yet its impact, as lived out thought the Holy Spirit

Is alive like fire, can cut through anything

Is mobile like a dove, winged and heavenward

Is mysterious and ever spiraling upward.

It is often described as Poetry.

Listen, not with your brains but with your hearts,
To Rilke one poets attempt at approximating the divine as relationship

*You, you only, exist.
We pass away, till at last,
our passing is so immense
that you arise: beautiful moment,
in all your suddenness,
Arising in love...*

You are also to testify because you have been with me since the beginning.
We too are sent to testify.
God is everywhere, yes, but not in isolation.
God is between us and the other.
Now and always.

Friends, if we worship a God who is not one but three, not three but one, a God of relationship, a God who some say IS relating itself, a verb not a noun, Then I don't have to tell you How to be evangelical. How to tell the good news, how to give it, how to receive it. It is the ongoing work of our lives. (Like any work, complex, hard, and sometimes straining and challenging to our very core)

If God is relational, then you are surely at no loss
Of how to spread the gospel.
We try to do it with our children, all the time
And there are ways you can do it, as St. Francis said,
Without even ever mentioning the words.

So friends this morning, let us take a moment, if you choose,
To try to do this ancient ritual. I ask you as I close to take a moment—
If you are comfortable—
And make the sign of the cross on your own body—let us cross ourselves now
in the name of, God, Christ, and Holy Spirit,
And see what good news there might be
About all that this might mean.

And let the people say Amen.