

Better Together

A Sermon by Rev. Katherine Schofield

Sunday, June 7, 2020 | Old South Church in Boston

There are some things we'll never know. And then said that there are some things that you just know -- you know?

One thing I don't think I'll ever fully know is the Trinity. The mysterious three fold nature of God. Centuries of theologians have delved into this concept, this understanding of the divine, -- which only highlights that God (Creator, Christ and Spirit), one in three-three in one -- can never fully be put in a box. And that's something I love about God.

But there's something I do know. I know how a parent loves a child. I know how a teacher or doctor cares for those in their charge. I know how a community - inspired and empowered, can move mountains and build a better world. In this way, I come to know -- through experience -- more and more about the Trinity, the Divine in Relationship.

The Trinity - Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, are the perfect model of unity in diversity, a community of relationship, distinct and yet so perfectly intertwined that you cannot tell where one begins and the other ends.

The Creator God sets things in motion to allow for the work of Christ and the moving of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ God the parent is able to show forgiveness and grace and the Holy Spirit is given a community to empower. Christ, the Word, allows God to speak, to heal, to teach and to love on the earth. And the Spirit emblazons the hearts of all who would continue the creating work to build God's Kingdom of Justice and Peace. The Trinity - three in one -- is better together.

And if we claim, as the bible tells us in the first chapter of Genesis that humankind, you and I and every single person, are created in the image and likeness of God, then the very core of our being is a call to be in relationship and build community. And - we are better together.

When we build genuine relationships with people who are different from us, our hearts and minds are opened in new ways. We learn more from listening to a diversity of voices. We come to more fully understand the suffering of others. By being in relationship with others we are transformed into better followers of Christ, more loving neighbors, more humble forgiveness seekers. We are Better Together.

But this is hard work. It is vulnerable and painful work. To build relationships we must listen deeply, look at ourselves with scrutiny and acknowledge where bias, and racism, and sin find a seat in our institutions and in our own hearts. It is work that Old South Church has taken on in a

serious fashion, seeking repentance, building space for conversations, and taking action to uproot structural oppression and unleash collective liberation in our society. But the work is far from done.

We need the full power of the Triune God. Right here and now. Our voices join with the voices of black people and people of color everywhere to cry out in lament. There is violence and injustice in the street, hatred and fear and oppression in the street. Deep division. Frustration. Despair. Though we who have privilege would turn away, we must cry out - this is not how things should be!

And when we face it, and name it - racism, injustice, -- when we name them, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmad Arbury, Tony McDade -- when we cry out in lament -- as Queer Womanist Theologian Emilie Townes notes, "Our Laments mark the beginning of the healing process." Naming these horrors in an unrestrained lament helps mold us into a people who respond with an emphatic "No!" to the ways people have been dehumanized and crushed, communities have been demonized and decimated, faith has been used as a platform for bigotry and hate. Our Lament becomes a prayer; more than just an expression of sorrow, Lament is an act of trust, we pour out our fears, frustrations and sorrows to God in whom we trust. And so Lament becomes the starting place of Hope because it allows us to envision, together with God, how the world could be.

When Paul writes the passage we just heard, the one about putting things in order, living in peace and agreeing with one another, he is writing to a community deeply divided. The people of Corinth are split, some following the teachings of Paul, others denouncing him and inciting violence against him. Some fear these new teachings of Christianity and worry how this shift will impact their businesses and families. Riots have broken out in neighboring cities. There is violence in the streets.

Paul has already written a harshly worded letter - lost to history - and for a while it seemed that the community was unified again. But then, deep divisions -- covered over but not resolved -- divide the community once more. In these closing lines of 2nd Corinthians, almost a post-script, I can hear Paul's lament. The voice of one who once used state-sanctioned violence to oppress others, whose life was transformed through relationship with Christ, who now risks his own life and safety to share the good news of God's love and grace for all people - but his voice continues to fall on deaf ears. So he pleads, he appeals to them...

Put things in order! Agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Paul's appeal that they agree with one another does not mean they must always hold the same opinion, but that they must agree on matters that are vital to their functioning as the body of Christ.

Agree that every person has inherent dignity and sacred worth.

Agree that though we are different we are unified through the sacrament of communion.

Agree that we are better together. That we need one another.

Agree that we are called to pursue justice and liberation for all people.

And Paul leaves them with the Triune or three-fold blessing that has come to be a part of our worship life ever since -

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

As the Trinity is better together, we humankind are better together

And together we have great power. Together as we cry out in lament, that power is rooted in hope. Hope for a coming kingdom of justice for all people, and peace that does not whitewash our differences but cultivates a wholeness of blessed diverse community.

And the time to build that future is now. It is clear that the coronavirus has disrupted the pattern of our lives. That, even as we begin to re-enter society, the world will not be the same as it was. This time apart is an opportunity for us to re-envision and re-imagine how we want society to be structured on the other side. It's time to fight for a better world that finally grapples with the sins of slavery, Jim Crow, red-lining, mass incarceration, the militarization of police departments, and the growth of surveillance and state repression that have all been disproportionately inflicted on black and brown people and communities. If we do not, we will be guilty of continuing to perpetuate a racist oppressive system that no moral person can justify. But why stop there. It's time to reshape the ways we use energy and natural resources to make a real dent in the climate crisis, time to reinvent our broken healthcare infrastructures, time to educate our kids about the truth of the past and the possibilities of the future - and to pay teachers what they deserve. It's time, it's well past time.

It's a lot - But we can do it. There are already people organizing to make these changes, in ways big and small. I've seen so many of you, in this past week alone, who have taken action to fight against white supremacy. When others might ask -- where is God? -- you have responded to say, "we are God's hands, and feet, and hearts in this world." And together - we have much power -- and together we will build the better future that must come next.

And The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.