

Sermon for Sunday June 7, 2020
Trinity Sunday
Matthew 28:16-20
St. Matthews, Kitchener radio broadcast
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Let me begin by thanking you for the invitation to be with you today. As Pastor Carey mentioned, one of the ways I serve our church is by chairing our Synod's Racial Justice Advisory Committee. I am deeply passionate about this work and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about it.

As you've also heard already, today is Holy Trinity Sunday. This is a bit of a peculiar day on the church calendar; it's the only Sunday of the whole year dedicated to a church doctrine, rather than a Biblical event. Let me tell you, for preachers far and wide, there is a great temptation to do a deep dive into doctrinal explanations on this day. And I promise you it is a temptation to which I have succumbed, in the past. But (you may be glad to hear), I'm over it. Here's all we need to know. God is one – only one. At the same time, God is three – complete and separate – three. But, only one. In the end, I have made peace that I just *will not* understand how this works. Instead of trying, perhaps our faith can help us to accept that God's nature is a mystery bigger than we can comprehend; which might allow us to **dwell** in its beauty without needing to understand it.

And resigning ourselves to incomplete understanding doesn't take anything away. I don't have to understand how three can equal one and three all at the same time, to understand that this three in one is only possible if the three exist in relationship to the one – and the one to the three. I think that what we believe about the Trinity is the best, most

harmonious model of community we have. It is a demonstrated relationship that includes love, trust, and selflessness.

Imagine a relationship where your partners are always, totally and completely invested in your well-being. They look out for you, take care of you, at all costs. In return, you spend your whole life doing the same for them. The trinity shows us what it can look like to live in perfect community.

As we heard in the Genesis text this morning that Pastor Carey read, we are all created in the image of God. I believe that means we are intended to live in community, just like the Trinity. In fact, the risks of loneliness (not living in community) are well documented. Lonely people are more likely to suffer from depression, they're more than twice as likely to develop symptoms of dementia, more likely to have sleep dysfunctions, or have thoughts of suicide. There's also a host of data that shows that loneliness affects our immune system – meaning that living in healthy community means we'll very likely also be healthier physically.¹

So, we do well to make community a priority. But, God's vision of community includes all of God's created children. People of every colour, creed, sexual orientation, and ability. In God's vision, all people are equal and live in harmony – men and women, gay and straight, rich and poor (not that I really think poverty is in God's vision), but you know what I'm getting at.

Trouble is, we are not living out **God's vision** of community, friends. Not even close. The abuses are many, but this week we have no choice but to name the sin of racism and how it betrays God's vision. Racism behaves like a virus – and viruses are something many of us have learned

¹ From the Journal of Clinical & Diagnostic Research <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4225959/>
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a lot about lately. Like a virus, racism often lives within a host, almost asymptotically, only to rear its ugly head under the right conditions. Of course, it's easy to remain asymptomatic when everyone around you, looks like you. Too often, we say 'I'm not racist, I believe that everyone is equal' without really looking inside to see the ways in which we, too, harbour unfair assumptions and believe in stereotypes. It is these things, which reside deep within us, unchecked, that become dangerous – even life threatening to our Siblings of Colour.

Racism proved deadly to George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery. Racism risked the life of Christian Cooper when he asked a White woman to leash her dog when she subsequently called the police and informed them that a Black man was attacking her.

Now, if you're thinking that these are all examples from our southern neighbours, then I'd ask you to wait a moment before you finish that thought. Because, you need to know is that racism IS in Canada, even if we hide it better or mask it in politeness. In Canada, our worst racism statistics are not about people of African descent (though those ones certainly aren't good) but the worst is for those of Indigenous heritage. When the CBC sought to compile a database of every person who died during a police intervention from the year 2000 to 2017 the numbers were clear. In the city of Winnipeg, Indigenous people made up about 10.6% of the city's population, but made up more than 60% of those who died in police encounters. In Toronto, Black people accounted for 37% of the victims, while only representing about 8% of the population. And last fall, a report out of Montreal showed Indigenous and Black people to be 4 and 5 times more likely to be stopped for street checks by Montreal police.

Racism in Canada is well documented; but the statistics can't tell the stories of people who become accustomed to being followed by suspicious salespeople through stores, the stories of those who are told by strangers in parking lots to 'go back to where they came from' (even though their families have lived in Canada longer than many of ours), or the stories of people who still today bear the negative effects of residential schools. I, personally, know People of Colour who have experienced all of these things.

While we shake our heads in dismay and say 'that's awful', we, as people of God need to realize that nothing will change unless we do more than shake our heads and wring our hands. We have to decide to show up for our Siblings of Colour, to decide to stand shoulder to shoulder with them, to do the hard work of examining our own biases and prejudices. Let me be honest, the work of seeking racial justice is not easy, it is a long road, littered with potholes of unchecked bias and tripping hazards of privilege. There is no sugar-coating it, friends, it's hard work.

But it's also **necessary**.

If we join our voices together and sing 'come, join the dance of Trinity', and then don't do everything we can to bring about God's vision for community, then we're saying we're ok if not everyone is welcome to dance with us. If we claim identity as Children of God, but do not seek to lift up every voice of every person who has been silenced, if we do not actively use our privilege to try to destroy White privilege, then we do not honour the beautiful example of Trinity's relationship.

Now, I understand the feeling of overwhelm that often visits us when we seek to begin this work. And I'm sorry to tell you, there is no prescription for what you can do to become a racial justice seeker and ally. Though, I

can tell you that a very good place to begin is within – to do some honest and hearty self-examination and to pledge to learn more. After that, your work depends on who you are and where you are – what I will say is that no matter who or where, there is work to be done.

For decades now (perhaps centuries), people have been trying to get us all closer to God's vision for community. Martin Luther King Jr. described his dream in words that have been memorialized since 1963. I have a dream too. But none of our dreams for getting closer to the kin-dom of God will happen without the collective work of the faithful. Each of us is called to love God and love neighbour; to look to the dance of the Trinity and know, deep inside of us, that the dance won't be complete until all are truly welcome.

God created each one of us, a beloved child of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May God's love, Jesus' example, and the Spirit's fire unite us in seeking to dance the dance of equality, justice, and love – together.

Amen.