

Trinity Sunday

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## The Power of And

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Thanks to the long running animated Saturday morning program *School House Rock*, I was introduced to subjects like history, government, math, science and grammar long before I was old enough to learn about them in school. One of my favorite and most memorable episodes of *School House Rock* taught me the value of conjunctions: those short little words that are used, as the song *Conjunction Junction* goes, “to hook together phrases and clauses that balance.” It is a great cartoon and that cartoon is how I first discovered the power of the word AND.

While the word AND has proven incredibly helpful to me in the many notes, papers, letters, sermons, emails, and other written communications I have composed, I have recently begun to see the word AND in a new light. Thanks to the work of Susan Scott, who in her bestselling book *Fierce Conversations*, which is currently being used in schools, dioceses, churches, businesses, and by individuals all around the country, I have come to see that little word AND can actually do a lot more than put together phrases and clauses. According to Susan Scott, the word AND can help us rise to a new level of awareness when it comes to communicating needs, awareness, and realities.

In her book, Susan Scott writes about how another often used conjunction, the word BUT, is used when it comes to communicating priorities. She gives the example of the sentence: *I know you have a lot on your plate, but the deadline is getting near*. Susan says if you listen to what the speaker of the sentence is really saying, whatever comes before the word BUT really isn't important or doesn't matter; the word BUT, in this case, is negating what preceded it. This gives the person who the sentence was directed at the impression of not only what really is important, but what isn't, and can help contribute to a belief in a limited economy of energy and time. In other words, the deadline is more important than whatever else is on the person's plate and therefore all that stuff doesn't matter.

Susan challenges us to consider re-stating that sentence substituting the word AND in place of the word BUT and see how it makes a difference:

*I know you have a lot on your plate, and the deadline is getting near.*

Now we can see there is a shared priority instead of a limited one, where there is room for both the reality that there is a lot of stuff on a person's plate and the approaching deadline. This version still names the priority, and does so in a way that where anxiety is absent. In her book, which is about finding ways for people of all walks of life to have healthy, honest conversations, Susan suggests we all try considering using the word BUT less and using the word AND more, as she feels the word AND is more inclusive, and helps to create an environment or economy that allows resources to become more visible and accessible.

When I encounter other people who have also read Susan Scott's book, one of the things they most often tell me is how that one part of her book has changed their communications for the better, all because of the small and mighty word AND.

The word AND isn't just for sentences, it is also a vital part of the Trinity, our Christian belief of God as being 3 Persons (Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit) in 1 God, which the Church commemorates today. It might seem strange to us that the Church lifts up this doctrine when usually we celebrate events that brought about the Christian faith like Jesus' birth and Resurrection. Church historians could certainly give a better sermon than I can about how this doctrine came about, how it has always been as much a mystery as it is a belief, and how arguments about it by prominent historical figures has led to division in the church. Which I believe is ironic because the whole idea of the Trinity is unity. Today, however, I want to look a little closer at the AND in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

If you notice, in our liturgy and prayers, often when the Trinity is invoked so is the word AND (The Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit). The AND appears to connect the Persons in a way that creates an incredible economy: where there is room for and inclusion of all Persons of the Trinity that is not artificial or limited. It is a deep connection that gives and receives and allows for freedom while at the same time gives support and holds on. This connection does not seem to be fearful, nor competitive. The Trinity is an incredible economy of love.

Which means the AND of Trinity could be said to be relational, only Trinity expresses a type of relationship that might be quite foreign to us human beings who are quick to point out limitation's and fears and create economies where there are hierarchies, or winners and losers and not ever enough so a person who has must hang on tightly to whatever they have. We humans are much more familiar with economies built around satisfying appetites than we are creating and participating in economies of love where all are equal, violence against people is unnecessary, and fear and hate have no place.

For those of you who might want a longer word than AND to think about when it comes to the Trinity, scholars use the fabulous Greek work perichoresis, which means intimate union or intimate indwelling of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit with each other. One of my seminary professors tried to describe it as the 3 Persons of the Trinity as being in a dance, where there is fluid movement between the 3 Persons. This imaginative imagery makes it easy for me to envision the Trinity as full of delight and joy. Which makes that Trinity a beautiful economy of love.

Whether it is the word AND or perichoresis that catches our attention today, we might reflect on what it means for us as individuals and a parish to worship, believe in, and follow this amazing God who is love that is not stagnant nor stingy, but fluid, giving, and holy. In a recent interview on PBS, our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry talked once again about his vision for the Episcopal Church. I admire and echo his vision that we don't have to live the nightmare of the world, by which I believe he means all the fear and hate and anger that is out there and instead we can live the dream of God. In the Presiding Bishop's words I hear both vision and longing, a longing for something that is much more like Trinitarian economy: where there is love for all and room for all because we feed each other this love, giving it and receiving all at the same time. In the interview the Presiding Bishop wondered what it would be like if all Episcopalians, or maybe even all Christians, began living for what we long for instead of what we fear.

I don't know about you, but I long for and wonder the same thing and I would like to find out. The only way to find out is to do it. Trinity Sunday is the perfect day to remember Trinity isn't just words we mumble through every time we recite the Nicene Creed, which we'll do in a few seconds. Trinity, God, is an economy of love we are invited into, invited to live, as the Presiding Bishop reminded us in his interview.

How might we live the AND of Trinity here at Good Shepherd? What can we say and do to embody such an AND? These are not questions for which I have quick easy answers, and I didn't intend for them to be quickly answered. I'm not sure Trinity Sunday is a day for answers as much as it is a day for engaging our holy imaginations. Today I hope these questions might spark our holy imaginations and evoke our longings. Longings we can flesh out in prayer and in conversations that lead us deeper into the mysterious dance of the economy of love that will manifest themselves in surprising ANDs of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.