

Trinity Sunday B May 27, 2018

God's Love is More than Enough

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Christian apologist, writer, and scholar, C.S. Lewis, wrote in one his best-known books *Mere Christianity*, "Naturally God knows how to describe Himself much better than we know how to describe him." Now, some people might read into this quote that C.S. Lewis was indicating God has a gender and that gender is male, but that is not the case. C. S. Lewis wrote that sentence long before we had the benefit of liberation theology and feminist theology to help us see how referring to God as male, even if it was just for sake of clear writing, gave an inaccurate impression that God has a gender, which could lead to the harmful ideology that one gender is superior to others. C. S. Lewis was not saying that at all. In fact, what he was talking about was something far deeper and richer when he wrote that sentence. Lewis was writing about the Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday. As far as the Church calendar is concerned, this the first Sunday in the season after Pentecost Sunday. And it's the day the Church reminds us God is not easily defined or put into a box of our own making. The Church calendar has led us here from the season of Lent and Holy Week where we were brought face to face yet again with Jesus' suffering and sacrifice: his trial, his crucifixion, his death and burial. We've celebrated Jesus' resurrection not just on Easter Sunday, but for 50 days we celebrated God is more powerful than anything we human beings can do to each other. God is more powerful than death itself. As God's Son, Jesus showed us who God is, and those who cling to an angry, violent, vengeful god were disappointed once again as Jesus showed us God is love, and God loves us so much, God gave us God's Son, as we heard in John's Gospel this morning, not to condemn, not to punish, but to save this world. Because God loves the world and everything and everyone in it. Because that is what God is. Love.

Of all the messages Jesus brought, some followers of Jesus to this day have a hard time accepting it. No matter how often or how powerfully preached the message is.

By now I'm sure most of you have heard the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Michael Curry's sermon from the royal wedding last Saturday. It was a powerful message of God's love. It was a powerful message of how love, any love even romantic love can be a part of God. People like me heard an empowering message, a message that all people are created in God's image and therefore part of that love and when we live that love then we help create the kingdom of God here on earth.

But even though they listened to the same words as I did, not everyone heard that message. There were people who never heard the connection between romantic love and the love of God, there were people who thought what the Presiding Bishop preached was a fake gospel, because he didn't talk enough about Jesus' suffering and death or being saved. It wasn't long before folks were writing responses titled "The Love of God Isn't Enough" to sum up their disappointment in the Presiding Bishop's sermon. Now, I believe everyone has the right to not like something, we don't all have to like everything. I'm not taking issue with someone because they don't like a sermon I happened to like. What troubled me was the thought that God's Love is not enough.

One of the people who taught such a term is not only incorrect, it speaks to a sinful selfishness is C.S. Lewis. Lewis wrote that there is more to God than Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. These are not to be diminished, they are part of a much larger whole, something much too vast to grasp or understand. Which is why Easter isn't the only celebration or season of the Church Year. Last Sunday we celebrated the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus' mother and those who followed Jesus and how after that event those who followed Jesus were no longer sitting inside praying, they were inspired and somehow guided to leave their safe place and go out among all people and tell about the wonderful works of God. The Holy Spirit and its mysterious energy is just as much a part of it all as Jesus. Which brings us to today: a day we call Trinity Sunday where we are reminded, as C. S. Lewis wrote, that God knows how to describe God's self far better than we do. And the word and doctrine we use to remind us of how God describes God's self, is Trinity.

You can look up the doctrine of Trinity in your Book of Common Prayer if you want a refresher on the Three Persons in One Being doctrine. And there are thousands of theology books that will try to break it down for you. One of them is C. S. Lewis's book *Mere Christianity*. In it, Lewis described how the term God is Love is actually a way of describing the Trinity.

Trinity doctrine assumes God is Three Persons in One Being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Often this idea is represented by the image of a triangle or Celtic knot, with God at the top, or God and Son at the top. But Lewis didn't imagine the Trinity in such hierarchical terms. Instead he saw it as relational. He wrote: "The union between Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person."

Take a moment and let that sink in. Lewis is essentially calling the Holy Spirit the embodiment of God's love between Father and Son. This Holy Spirit then also interacts with us human beings from within our souls, connecting us to God, who is

Trinity, who is relationship and the name of that relationship is love. Lewis concludes that therefore God is love, “and that love works through people – through the whole community of Christians. But this spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and the Son.” That is God, all of God. So, if God is Trinity, and if love is how God describes God’s self, then Trinity is love. So how could the Love of God not be enough?

Perhaps the problem is we human beings have a difficult time understanding something that isn’t transactional. You know, if you want a cup of coffee, you go to a coffee shop and place an order, pay money, and someone gives you what you paid for. If you want food, you go to the farmers market or the grocery store and select the food you want, give money to the farmer or store employee, and you can take the food home. If you have a job, you show up and do the work you are assigned to do and get paid for that work, that’s a transaction. There are some places in the world where marriages are transactions between families as a way of either securing more land or gaining loyalty. The practice of paying a man a dowry to marry a daughter was a transaction, it was a way for the woman to contribute something of value to the marriage. These are all transactions that had nothing to do with love or relationships based in love. There are many tragic tales of couples in love that couldn’t pay dowries or star-crossed lovers who could never be together because they were not in the same class. In those situations, love was seen as a problem, and something that would never last as long as property or money. Transactions create power structures that promote ownership and inequality. In light of such examples, you might see why there are those who would be offended if you say God is Love, for Love is not easy to quantify and trade and suggests an equality that might be frightening because it assumes a responsibility to care for and carry each other. Some folks prefer the idea that Jesus paid a price for our sins, he took care of the transaction, so we don’t have to and end the story there.

But if God is Love, then Jesus did more than just pay a transaction, through his death and resurrection he has connected us to Trinity, to God who is Love, so that we are now part of that relationship. And when we are part of such a relationship, it isn’t about paying, it’s about participating, it’s about us loving God who has given God’s all so we -you, me, our neighbors, all humanity- can be part of this relationship, by what we do and say.

Several years ago, when I was in seminary, I felt connection to that relationship. It was at the end of a very long and very difficult day, though I can’t now remember what made it so long or so difficult, I just remember going to Evensong. At Nashotah House we had Evensong every day at 4:30 and it was mandatory, so you went no matter what kind of day you were having. I remember being in my choir stall

and just not having it in me to say or sing the words in the service. All I could do was stand or sit or kneel when it was appropriate. And just by doing that, I experienced something as beautiful as it was unexpected: as the service went on I didn't feel left out or like I wasn't a part of what was going on around me. I felt included, as if I was being carried along by that community: some of whom were my friends, some I didn't like or get along with, some didn't like me and a few thought I shouldn't be there, the professors, fellow students, all together they carried me with them in worship when I couldn't do it myself. It made me wonder when I had unknowingly done the same for some of them. That, I believe is a small way of experiencing Trinity in action, of being loved by God and loving God and your neighbor and letting God and your neighbor love you.

Such love is powerful. Such love is humbling. And it is so very real. It's enough love to carry the weary through another day. It's enough love to heal the broken hearted. It's enough love to inspire courage to learn something new. It's enough love to help us stand up to those who would rather hate. It's enough to bridge the many divisions we create to isolate ourselves from each other. It's more than enough love to bring change to the world, to work with God to transform this world into the dream God has for all of us. Perhaps that is another way to imagine Trinity: Trinity is God. God is love. And God's love is more than enough.