



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
5-31-15

Perhaps some of you have heard of whirling dervishes and perhaps some of that knowledge has come from the Bugs Bunny cartoon character – the Tasmanian devil – a whirling, swirling wild creature. If not from Taz, maybe you know that a dervish is a dedicated monastic Sufi person who sometimes uses an elegant whirling dance as a form of worship. They start like this.....and then twirl and twirl until their body and soul are caught up into the mystical oneness with God. Body, mind, and spirit – all dancing in praise, in ecstasy, in reverence, in worship. And never is the dance done alone. They whirl about a central figure and they have four parts to the dance – there is a prescribed form to this holy ritual – a wondrous ritual to watch and one that must take intense discipline and concentration in order to be caught up into its holy mystery.

I bring up the whirling dervishes because their dance is a unity of body and motion in worship. And because today is Trinity Sunday when we consider our worship of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. One image – one way to imagine the Trinity is as a dance – a dance of three – intertwined, bound together, inextricable from each other. The arms are entwined, the legs shared, the essence of their separate Threeness swirled into one. So, that when you call on Jesus Christ – you get all three. When you call on God our Lord – you get all three. When you pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance – you get all three. They do not function apart from each other.

A thoughtful parishioner once asked me about the word Lord. He was confused – who was the Lord? You might have noticed in our old testament and in the Psalms – there the Lord must refer to God the creator, but we also speak of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we hear in the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Lord, the giver of life. I would tell you - your Lord is whomever you give your heart, mind, and soul to and with our understanding of the Trinity – you call on one of them as Lord – you are blessed with all three.

Let's think a bit more about the eternal relationship, the eternal dance of these three – they are the flesh of Jesus with the Spirit, they are the earthly Jesus with the heavenly God, it is God always with neighbors – Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They remain a mystery- yet they are the very essence of our worship and their dance together invites us into the same dance in worship. For we also dance when we worship.

You remember the two great commandments: You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, and soul. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Thereby hangs all the other laws and commandments. Thereby hangs the core of our worship. Just as the Trinity can be

understand as bound together in a holy dance – so to our worship should be considered as an eternal, reverent, mystical dance of unity with the Trinity and with each other.

We gather to join with the Trinity in a holy dance done together. We gather our focus with prayer or silence or in greeting each other. We listen to sacred words. We sing, we pray, we confess, we eat, we forgive, we touch each other, we bless, we bow, we profess, we participate in age old rituals and teachings about how to love God and each other. For just as the Trinity can not be separated – neither can we be separated from God and each other in all of our life on this earth.

You might be tempted to say to yourself that you and God do just fine together – but that’s an impossibility because God is bound in a unity with two others – just as your life is bound with a family of others. And the dance of worship is always with others – in a dance that connects our earthly selves with the heavenly, a dance that unites our fleshly self with the Spirit, a dance that honors God and honors our neighbor. This dance is the source of life. This worship is the place where we are born again, and again, and again, over and over as we are born and filled with water and the Spirit- both- for we are both.

Just as I hope the Trinity can teach you the idea of a unity in difference – so too are we both flesh and spirit, heavenly and earthly – surrounded by a Spirit that blows on us from the outside and from the inside. A Spirit that fills us with God’s presence and fills our neighbor with the same presence and a dance of worship that asks us to be caught up into love for each other and for God.

I am working my way through reading “The Brothers Karamozov” by Dostoyevsky. Early on one of the brothers is explaining what a spiritual person he is and he exclaims quite sincerely that “I love all of humanity – from a distance but up close they become a problem.” That is why we have to gather here on pews and sit next to other people and listen to their stories and watch them come down the aisle after communion and touch their hands giving peace and listen to them sing off key or make a confession or ask for prayer. It is “up close’ where we practice loving.

Former Archbishop Rowan Williams has said that, “There is no goodness that is not bodily and realistic and local.” So don’t try to separate yourself from your own earthly self, don’t try to separate yourself from your earthly neighbor, don’t try to separate yourself into a fantasy of who you want to be someday. Stay realistic, stay in your personhood, stay where you find yourself to be – and then dance. Dance into the goodness of God, dance into the goodness of love, dance into the worship that brings life.

Thanks be to God.