

Date: May 31, 2015
Scriptures: Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17
Title: Relational Life

FROM THE BULLETIN,
YOU KNOW TODAY IS TRINITY SUNDAY.
HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW
WHY WE CELEBRATE TRINITY SUNDAY?
IT HAS NOTHING TO DO
WITH A CERTAIN UNIVERSITY IN SAN ANTONIO.
IN A NUTSHELL,
TRINITY SUNDAY ACKNOWLEDGES
GOD IS THREE PERSONS IN ONE SUBSTANCE
FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT.

THIS KIND OF LANGUAGE MAKES
THEOLOGIAN'S HEARTS BEAT FASTER.
BUT, IT DOESN'T HAVE THAT EFFECT ON EVERYONE.
SO, BEFORE YOUR EYES GLAZE OVER
AND YOU BEGIN TO CONTEMPLATE LUNCH,
LET ME QUICKLY ADD
THAT THE TRINITY IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS.
MORE SPECIFICALLY, IT'S ABOUT
GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD
AND GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OF US.
ALWAYS, WHAT GOD DOES IS RELATIONAL AND INVITING.
IT IS NEVER AUTHORITARIAN OR INSISTENT.
THIS WAY OF BEING IN THE WORLD
REFLECTS WHO GOD IS WITHIN GOD'S SELF.

IN ADDITION TO REVEALING
THAT ALL OF LIFE IS RELATIONAL,
THE TRINITY ALSO REVEALS
THAT WE ARE EACH
MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE.

WE ARE EACH
MORE THAN WE DEFINE OURSELVES AS
AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT.
THE WORLD IS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE.
LIFE IN ALL ITS MYRIAD FORMS
IS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE.
AND WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE
THAT IS TOO WONDERFUL FOR US?
WE FLATTEN OUT
THIS AMAZING, MULTIDIMENSIONAL CREATION.
WE REDUCE IT TO TWO DIMENSIONS.
IN SO DOING, WE LOSE SIGHT

OF WHO WE ARE IN ALL OUR COMPLEXITY
AND ALSO OF WHO OTHERS ARE
IN ALL OF THEIR COMPLEXITY.

YOU MAY KNOW THAT I HAVE BEEN ATTENDING
A BIBLE STUDY THURSDAY AFTERNOONS
FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW.

KATHY TREVINO LEADS IT
AND IS ALSO THE ONE,
WHO INVITED ME TO JOIN THE GROUP.

I WAS HESITANT,
BECAUSE I DID NOT KNOW
ANY OF THE OTHER WOMEN.

BUT, I KNEW KATHY
AND WANTED TO BE A PART
OF A REGULAR BIBLE STUDY
SO I SET MY UNEASINESS ASIDE.

I AM SO GLAD I DID.
IT HAS BEEN WONDERFUL
TO ENGAGE IN REGULAR STUDY
OF SCRIPTURE WITH OTHERS
AND IN THE PROCESS
TO HAVE GOD KNIT
OUR HEARTS TOGETHER.

EACH WOMAN THERE IS TRULY MY SISTER IN CHRIST.

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, ONE OF THE WOMEN, ALICE,
BEGAN HAVING PAIN IN HER GUT.
SHE GAVE THE PAIN TWO WEEKS TO GET OUT OF DODGE
AND THEN WENT TO THE DOCTOR.

ALICE IS A DOWN-TO-EARTH,
NO-NONSENSE KIND OF WOMAN.

THE DOCTOR TOOK HER PAIN SERIOUSLY.
HE RAN A VARIETY OF TESTS AND FOUND NOTHING.
THE PAIN DID NOT GO AWAY.

IN FACT IT GOT WORSE.
THE DOCTOR ORDERED MORE TESTS.

AGAIN, NOTHING SHOWED UP.
THIS WENT ON FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS.

FINALLY, THE DOCTOR SUGGESTED
THAT ALICE SEE AN ONCOLOGIST.
FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL, MORE ESOTERIC TESTS,
THE ONCOLOGIST DIAGNOSED ALICE
WITH PERITONEAL CANCER,
WHICH IS VERY RARE.

AFTER MORE CONSULTATION
WITH HER ONCOLOGIST HERE IN AUSTIN
AND ALSO WITH ONE AT MD ANDERSON,

IT WAS DECIDED ALICE WOULD HAVE
A SERIES OF NINE CHEMO TREATMENTS,
ONE "HEAVY" DOSE
FOLLOWED BY TWO "LIGHT" DOSES
OVER A PERIOD OF NINE WEEKS.

THE GOOD NEWS WAS
THE CHEMO WOULD BE ADMINISTERED
HERE IN AUSTIN,
WHICH KEPT ALICE HOME.

THE DAY BEFORE HER FIRST DOSE,
WE MET AT MY HOUSE
AND LED BY KATHY
ANOINTED ALICE FOR THE JOURNEY
SHE WAS ABOUT TO TAKE.

USING ANOINTING OIL,
WE MARKED ALICE WITH THE SIGN OF THE CROSS
AND OFFERED UP OUR PRAYERS FOR HER.
THEN, KATHY WRAPPED ALICE IN A QUILT
THAT HAD BEEN MADE FOR HER HUSBAND JUAN
BY THE CONGREGATION HE WAS SERVING
WHEN HE WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER.

A SYMBOL OF LOVE,
IT WENT WITH HIM TO ALL HIS CHEMO TREATMENTS.
THE QUILT WAS KATHY'S GIFT TO ALICE
THAT SHE MIGHT FEEL OUR LOVE
FUELED BY GOD'S LOVE
WHEN SHE HAD HER CHEMO TREATMENTS.

THE QUILT WENT WITH ALICE THE NEXT DAY.
IT WAS A "BIG" DAY ~
FIRST CHEMO TREATMENT,
HEAVY DOSE.
A COMMUNICATION SNAFU
BETWEEN THE DOC HERE AND THE DOC
AT MD ANDERSON HAD TO BE RESOLVED.

THAT TOOK TIME.
EVENTUALLY, MUCH LATER THAN PLANNED,
THE CHEMO BEGAN.

IT WAS EARLY EVENING
BEFORE ALICE,
HER DAUGHTER AMY,
AND HER BROTHER LEFT.

EVERYONE WAS EXHAUSTED.
AMY HEADED TO HER HOUSE TO GET HER UNCLE'S C-PAP.
ALICE AND HER BROTHER HEADED TO CHURCH'S
TO GET SUPPER.
THE PLAN WAS FOR AMY TO TAKE THE C-PAP TO CHURCH'S

SO HER UNCLE COULD SPEND THE NIGHT WITH ALICE.

AMY MADE THE DELIVERY AND HEADED HOME.
SHORTLY AFTERWARD,

ALICE AND HER BROTHER
GATHERED UP THEIR THINGS
AND STARTED TO ALICE'S.

THEY HAD GONE ABOUT HALFWAY
WHEN ALICE'S BROTHER REALIZED
HE HAD LEFT THE C-PAP AT CHURCH'S.

ALICE IMMEDIATELY TURNED THE CAR AROUND
AND HEADED BACK.

BOTH OF THEM WERE DOG TIRED,
BUT THEY NEEDED TO FIND THE MACHINE
SO HER BROTHER COULD SLEEP,

THEY DID A THOROUGH SEARCH
OF THE STORE, THE GROUNDS, THE BUSHES.

IT WAS GONE.

APPARENTLY, SOMEONE HAD WALKED OFF WITH IT.

DISHEARTENED, THEY RETURNED TO THE CAR,
CLIMBED IN,

AND DROVE HOME.

NEITHER HAD THE ENERGY TO SPEAK.

AT HOME, THEY ATE A BITE AND WENT TO BED.

IT WAS 11:30PM,

AND THE DAY HAD BEGUN BEFORE SUN UP.

ALICE'S HEAD HAD BARELY HIT THE PILLOW
WHEN THE PHONE RANG.

A WOMAN AT CHURCH'S DISCOVERED THE BAG
IN THE BUSHES NEAR THE ENTRY DOOR
WHEN SHE WAS LOCKING UP.

OPENING IT, SHE FOUND ALICE'S CONTACT INFO INSIDE.

QUICKLY, ALICE ROUSTED HER BROTHER,

AND TOGETHER THEY DROVE BACK TO CHURCH'S.

THE WOMAN HAD SAID SHE WOULD WAIT FOR THEM
TO RETURN TO THE STORE.

ONCE THERE, ALICE TRIED

TO GIVE THE WOMAN SOME MONEY

TO THANK HER FOR WAITING FOR THEM,

BUT THE WOMAN REFUSED

SAYING IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

WHO DO YOU SEE

WHEN YOU GO INTO A FAST FOOD ESTABLISHMENT?

DO YOU SEE A HUMAN BEING

IN ALL OF HIS OR HER COMPLEXITY?

DO YOU SEE A PERSON

WITH HOPES AND DREAMS,

FEARS AND REGRETS,
JOYS AND SORROWS?
DO YOU SEE A HUMAN BEING LIKE YOU ARE,
MULTIFACETED AND COMPLEX,
SOMEONE CAPABLE OF GOOD, EVEN HEROIC DEEDS
AND ALSO CAPABLE OF ACTING IN WAYS
THAT DIMINISH AND HURT?
OR DO YOU FLATTEN PEOPLE OUT?
DO YOU SEE SOMEONE
DOING A MENIAL JOB,
EARNING A MENIAL WAGE?
THAT NIGHT, THE CHURCH'S EMPLOYEE REVEALED,
WHO SHE IS
WHEN AFTER BEING ON HER FEET
MORE THAN EIGHT HOURS
CALLED AND THEN WAITED FOR ALICE.
SHE REVEALED THE DEPTH OF HER COMPLEXITY,
THE WONDROUS DEPTH
OF HER COMPASSION AND LOVE.

FRIDAY MORNING, I LISTENED TO A TED TALK
BY NOTED PSYCHIATRIST AND HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR,
VIKTOR FRANKEL.

THERE HE SAID,
"IF WE TAKE PEOPLE AS THEY REALLY ARE,
WE MAKE THEM WORSE.
BUT IF WE TAKE THEM AS THEY SHOULD BE,
WE MAKE THEM CAPABLE OF BECOMING
WHAT THEY CAN BE."

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE BE?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT DR. FRANKEL WOULD SAY.
I THINK EACH OF US SHOULD BE ALIVE TO THE TRUTH
THAT WE ARE ALL GOD'S BELOVED.
WHEN WE ARE ALIVE TO GOD'S LOVE
FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES,
WE LIVE DIFFERENTLY.
WE LIVE WITH A CHARITY
THAT SEEKS TO HELP PEOPLE BECOME
WHAT THEY CAN BE.

RACISM HAS HAD AND CONTINUES TO HAVE
A PROFOUND IMPACT ON AFRICAN AMERICANS
AND OTHER MINORITIES,
BOTH THEIR ACTIONS AND SELF WORTH.

I FIND IT AMAZING
THAT ALTHOUGH AFRICAN AMERICANS COMPRISE
JUST 13% OF THE US POPULATION
THEY MAKE UP 40% OF US PRISON POPULATIONS.

WITHOUT OPPORTUNITIES OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND JUST TREATMENT,
PEOPLE LOSE HOPE
AND FEELINGS OF ALIENATION, ANGER, AND DESPAIR
BEGIN TO CREEP IN.

THIS BUILDING PRESSURE COOKER OF EMOTIONS
IS WHAT WE ARE SEEING IN THE US TODAY.

EVERY NEW REVELATION
OF UNWARRANTED POLICE BRUTALITY
BRINGS PROTEST WHICH SOMETIMES
SPILLS OVER INTO VIOLENCE.

WHILE I DO NOT CONDONE THE VIOLENCE,
I DO UNDERSTAND IT.

I THINK THAT THOSE OF US,
WHO WATCH THESE EVENTS FROM POSITIONS OF PRIVILEGE,
NEED TO ASK OURSELVES WHAT WE ARE DOING
TO HELP PEOPLE BECOME WHAT THEY CAN BE.

THESE MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT TWO-DIMENSIONAL PEOPLE.

THEY ARE EVERY BIT
AS COMPLEX AND WONDROUS AS YOU AND I ARE
AND THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS
ARE AS IMPORTANT TO THEM AS OURS ARE TO US.

THEY WANT TO BE ABLE TO EARN A LIVING
AND PROVIDE FOR THEIR FAMILIES
AND EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN
AND TRUST THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS
WILL COME HOME
WHEN THEY GO OUT AT NIGHT.

THE REALITY OF WHAT MANY AFRICAN AMERICANS
AND MANY OTHERS LIKE THEM
ARE UP AGAINST TODAY
COMPELS US TO ACTION.

IT COMPELS US TO JOIN IN THE MORAL CRUSADE
TO HELP THEM HAVE
THE FREEDOM AND THE OPPORTUNITIES
WE HAVE FOR SO MANY YEARS ENJOYED.

WE DO IT
NOT BECAUSE IT IS FOR THE GOOD OF SOCIETY,
ALTHOUGH IT IS.

NOR DO WE DO IT,
BECAUSE IT IS THE JUST AND MORAL THING TO DO,
ALTHOUGH IT MOST CERTAINLY IS.

NO, WE DO IT,
BECAUSE WE ARE CREATED
AS RELATIONAL BEINGS BY A RELATIONAL GOD.

WE DO IT,
BECAUSE GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD,
AND WE ARE TO LOVE IT ALSO. AMEN.

