

Community!  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

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About two months ago, we celebrated the holiest day of our faith: Easter Sunday, the Feast of the Resurrection. We celebrated the fact God loves us so much Jesus died for our sins. In his death, we are redeemed. Our sins are wiped away. We are forgiven.

We also celebrated God is more powerful than death. God loves Jesus so much, God raised Jesus up from the dead to live with God for eternity. Our faith tells us God loves us just as much as God loves Jesus. Our faith tells us after our earthly death God will also raise us up, to live in God's loving embrace for eternity.

Last week, 50 days after Easter, we celebrated the holy festival of Pentecost. The birthday of the church. The coming of the Holy Spirit to nurture and sustain us. The work of the Holy Spirit shows us God is not far, far away. God is here, with us, as close as our breath.

Today, we celebrate God in God's wholeness. God's fulness. We celebrate God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Today we celebrate God is triune. God is one God, who lives eternally as three separate but interrelated beings. God is triune. God is triune.

About now, most congregations are going, "Ugh. Boring!" I get it. I do. The Doctrine of the Trinity can be a little dry. If this were not Trinity Sunday, I probably wouldn't be preaching on it. But today is Trinity Sunday, besides which the Trinity is important. The Doctrine of the Trinity says some important things about God. The Doctrine of the Trinity tells us important things about how we are to live as God's people. So please, hear me out. It's worth it.

As Reformed Christians, we understand God is triune. God is one God, but God exists as three distinct beings or persons. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Three entities, but one God.

What does this tell us about God? I could easily talk for an hour-and-a-half and not even scratch the surface. But today, let me just touch on two things.

First, the Doctrine of the Trinity tells us God is diverse. God is diverse. God is not just Father, or Son, or Holy Spirit. God is not just our Creator, or our Redeemer, or our Sustainer. God is all three, at once. God, by God's very nature, is diverse.

Each person of the Trinity is perfect and complete in themselves. But God is truly whole when the persons of the Trinity are all in loving community with each other.

This brings me to my second point. God is not only diverse; God is also communal. God, by God's very nature, is communal. God is whole when the persons of the Trinity are all in loving community with each other. God, by God's very nature, is a communal being.

God is diverse. God is communal. OK. That's nice. But what's that got to do with us?

Well, we as a church are meant to live in the image of God. We are to be like God. We as a church, St Paul's United Church of Christ, are meant to be diverse. We are a big tent. Within our fellowship we are meant to have room for a healthy diversity of beliefs, and skills, and ministries. We are not meant to be uniform, monochrome, each of us a carbon copy of the other. Our congregation is meant to include a healthy diversity in our community. Just as God is diverse, we should be diverse.

Also, we as a church are meant to be communal. We are meant to be in relationship with each other. We are not a gathering of isolated individuals. We are a community, a web of relationships. That's one reason why Passing-the-Peace is so important. It helps bind us together into a loving community. Just as God lives in loving relationship with the persons of the Trinity, we are meant to live in loving relationship with each other.

We all know an important relationship has just ended. Pastor Becky, after many years of good and faithful ministry, has retired. She has left the community of our congregation.

This is hard. Letting her go is difficult. A healthy pastor/parish relationship is kind of/sort of like a healthy marriage relationship. In a healthy, loving relationship the partners have an emotional bond with each other. They nourish each other. In

subtle ways they shape and transform each other. In a healthy, loving relationship the parties grow together. And when the relationship is broken, it hurts.

Our community has been broken. The relationship has ended. That's not a bad thing. It was time for Becky to retire. We wish her well and would never stand in her way. God be with you. But the relationship has ended, and that's hard. Now, we need to seek another pastor with whom to have a relationship. But before we do, there are two important things we need to accomplish.

First, we need to make room in our hearts for our next pastor. Becky will always have a place in our hearts. Certainly, of course. But she should no longer have the primary place in our hearts. That place belongs to our next pastor.

Making room for that person, remembering Becky fondly while also letting her go, is an important part of the interim process, the interim journey. It should take us about a year. Except in unusual circumstances, the rule-of-thumb is to allow one month of interim for every year of settled ministry. Pastor Becky was here about 13 years, I believe, so a year is about right. By taking that time, we both honor Becky and make room in our hearts for our next pastor.

As well as making room in our hearts, we also need to determine what kind of pastor we need. What kind of congregation are we? How have we evolved over the last 13 years? Where does God want us to go? What kind of ministry does God want us to do? What kind of pastor will we need to help us get there? Maybe our next pastor will need to be exactly like Becky. Maybe our next pastor will need skills and abilities Becky didn't have.

Making room in our hearts, determining what sort of pastor we're looking for, what skills our next pastor will need to take us where God wants us to go, that's the work of the interim journey. At first blush, it may seem rather daunting. Perhaps it is. But let me assure you, you are not walking this road alone.

My commitment to you is I will walk this road with you. I will make this interim journey with you. As you let Becky go, as you look at yourselves, as you seek your new pastor, I will walk beside you. I am walking this road with you.

More importantly, God is with us. God is walking this road with us. The God who created us in love and loved us into living, is with us. The God who lived among us and died for our sins and

was raised from the dead for us, is with us. The God who shouts to us from the mountaintops, who whispers in our ears, who is as close as the breath in our lungs, is with us. God, in God's fulness, is walking this road with us.

My friends, we are beginning a wonderful, exciting, joyful journey together. The good news of God is we are not making this journey alone. Our divinely diverse and communal God, who loves us and redeems us and sustains us, is with us. Our triune God is with us now, and forever past our journey's end.

Beloved, this is how much God loves us. Thanks be to God!  
Amen.