

**Trinity Sunday A**  
**Matthew 28: 16-20**  
**June 19, 2011**

**This is an impossible Sunday. This is only Sunday in the church calendar that celebrates a theological doctrine – the doctrine of the Trinity. Three in one and one in three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not three gods, but One God in three persons, or aspects, or essences, or natures.**

**How did this doctrine ... the doctrine of the Holy Trinity ... emerge? Somehow, over time, during its first few hundred years, the Christian church in both the West and the East felt pressured to explain in words – to *define* -- what it had come to know by experience.**

**That there was a God, the One God, the Creator, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, the maker of heaven and earth. And that this God, the Hebrew God, was the one Jesus called, “Father.” And that Jesus had somehow become more than just a good man and an inspiring teacher. That he had lived, been executed, and then was somehow as real and as alive as he had ever been. And that this experience of Jesus alive, of the power of the Creator, came through a spiritual force, an infusion of mystery and power and strength and gifts and wisdom and insight that also seemed alive and active and real and present.**

**And over time, they locked down this three-fold experience of God into a doctrine, crammed these ideas into creeds, taught them in universities and seminaries and gave them like secret knowledge to the ordained and the highly educated. God – THE God – got reduced to a symbol, a formula. And heaven help you if you got the formula wrong. The first major schism in Christianity, in the year 1054, was when the church in Byzantium and the church in Rome had a final argument over the nature of the Trinity. The whole of Christendom split in two over this question: did the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father AND the Son, or simply from the Father alone?**

**You know, if you think about the Trinity too long, it will make your brain hurt. Trust me on this one ... I've read pages and pages of dense German theologians droning on and on and on about the nature of the Trinity until I gave up and threw the books across the room. I've written a 20-page paper about John Calvin's ruminations on the Trinity. I've had to learn impossible words about how the persons of the Trinity all relate to each other. Words like *circumincession* and *perichoresis*. Words that are supposed to tell you how God works. Words that are supposed to make it all make sense.**

**It's days like these that make me long for the clarity of my long-departed friend, Carol Olowu. I was in a Bible study group for years with Carol, and every year when we would come to these lessons for Trinity Sunday, Carol -- God bless her sideways-thinking soul -- would smack the table where we gathered and say, "Who cooked up this business about the Trinity, anyway????"**

**Indeed.**

**Nothing I learned, or read, or wrote about the Trinity in seminary made me feel any better about this either. I didn't get it, I couldn't understand it, and I for sure couldn't explain it. I thought it was me. I thought I was just stupid, and a bad theologian, and probably a heretic to boot.**

**Until I walked into a theology class at Howard University in Washington, DC, and started moaning to the professor, Kelly Brown Douglas -- a dynamic African-American theologian and Episcopal priest. "I don't get the Trinity," I said. "It doesn't make any sense."**

**"The Trinity is the dance of God," she snapped back at me. And she left it at that. The dance of God.**

**I have since read other theologians who use this same imagery to recapture an ancient vision of the Trinity. It is a vision of Trinity as a community of love, ever moving, shifting, dancing in love, pouring out such love between Creator, Child and Spirit, that it overflows into all of creation as life and grace and redemption and peace.**

**A vision of a God who danced across the waters and brought the world into being. A vision of a God who laughed and cheered and danced and called it good. A vision of a God who danced into humanity, right through to the darkness of death and out the other side. A vision of a God who dances, here, today ... a Spirit summoning us in turn, into the eternal dance.**

**The Trinity is the dance of God. And what have we missed by immobilizing this dance in an image, a symbol, a doctrine, a creed? What has been stifled? What has been lost? And all of us ... why are we still hanging around the sides of the room, like a bunch of spiritual wallflowers, watching, wondering ... but not dancing? Why aren't we dancing with God?**

**The answer to that question is lying within today's gospel reading. Matthew tells us that on a mountaintop in Galilee, the resurrected Jesus met his disciples, just as he had promised them. And when they saw him, some worshipped – literally prostrated themselves in the original Greek. And some doubted.**

**And here we see the root of the problem. How right from the beginning, those who loved Jesus, who had travelled with him, who knew him, and now who recognized him in his eternal being ... they still didn't get it. Here he is, the resurrected Christ, shining on the mountain, laughing, dancing with glee. "It's all OK. I'm here. It's all under control. It's going to be great! Better than great! All of it, all of it in heaven and earth, is unfolding in God's dance."**

**And some fall down and worship him – you might think here of the scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, where God appears to Arthur and the knights and they throw themselves to the ground. And what does God say? "Stop groveling! If there's one thing I can't stand it's people groveling. And don't apologize. Every time I try to talk to someone it's 'sorry this, and forgive me that, and I'm not worthy.'"**

**Confronted with the reality of a God too big for their tiny little world, these disciples worship. They don't look. They don't listen. They sure as heck don't dance. They just fling themselves down on the ground and do nothing but mutter apologies.**

**Other disciples doubt. Instead of dancing, they stand back. They assess. They put themselves in the position of inspector, investigator, arbiter and judge. Hmmm ... is this for real? Hmmm ... what do we think about this? Hmmm ... this is going to require further thought. Confronted with the reality of a God too big for their tiny little world, these other disciples stand back, aloof, and disengaged.**

**Both sorts of disciples – the ones who worshipped and also the ones who doubted – didn't get it. They weren't supposed to fall down. They weren't supposed to step back. They were supposed to step in. Into the dance of discipleship. Into the dance with the one who breathed creation to life and brought the Kingdom of God into this broken world.**

**“Come on!” says the risen Jesus. “Let's go! I'm here! I'm dancing with you, always, all the time, forever. Let's go, let's dance, let's dance with everybody, every where, in every nation. Let's teach them how to dance my dance, the dance of love and acceptance and forgiveness and reconciliation. Let's baptize everyone we meet into the dance of God, pouring out love, overflowing love. Come on! I'm your dancing partner. Let's get out there and get it started!”**

**And the disciples freeze.**

**This has been the posture of humanity for millennia now. We are frozen. We avoid the dance of discipleship, of walking in the way, of actually LIVING like the way of Jesus is true. We don't really want to love our enemies, or visit prisoners, or forgive someone 490 times over. We don't feel able or nimble enough to dance as though everything was all going to be well and good and even great, no matter what might befall us. We are afraid and ornery and hurting and hesitant and self-focused and hard-hearted and busy and too terrified ... really ... to join in the dance.**

**Far easier to worship. “Oh God, you are so big and so awesome and I am so small and weak and I just can't really dance to save my life. But you are awesome and big and just really, really incredible. So I'll watch, while YOU dance.”**

**Far easier, too, to doubt. “Oh God, if you ARE God, I don’t know what to do if you are real. I don’t know which parts of scripture to read or throw away. I don’t know if any of it is even worth it. And I don’t know if dancing is what I really ought to be doing at this point in my life, anyway. So I’ll watch, while YOU dance.”**

**But what God really longs for us, what Jesus is directing us to do in today’s gospel, is to dance along with God. To dance the dance of God. Following Jesus’ lead as he swings us into the swirl.**

**Each of us in our own way, with our own steps and our own rhythm, weaving and whirling among all the other dancers, dancing the dream of God into reality – a dream of “a good creation of a friendly world of friendly folk beneath a friendly sky,” as theologian Verna Dozier put it. Making it move. Making it breathe. Making it real.**

**This is the dance we are called to join -- the dance of a Creator, of creation, and the spirit of life that pulses through them both. The dance of a parent, and of a child, and of the love that binds them together. The dance of the forgiver and the forgiven, and the peace that flows between them.**

**The dance of the disciple, the dance of the mystery beyond our knowing, the dance of the one, holy, Triune God -- a dance that is ours to enter, to take our own place in the dance of God’s beloved children.**