

The holy Gospel according to St. John the 3rd chapter....

Muy buenos días querida familia en Cristo! Good morning Church and welcome to worship on this Holy Trinity Sunday. I'm Pastor Justin Eller, Assistant to the Bishop for Latinx Ministry Initiatives and Associate Pastor at Amazing Grace Lutheran Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, and I bring you greetings today from Bishop Kevin Strickland, your Southeastern Synod Staff, and your fellow disciples across Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Even though we're spread over a wide geographical area, God fashions us into one community, the family of God because of our trinitarian faith. Today, on the first Sunday after Pentecost, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity: the Triune God, the Divine Three-in-One, the Perfect Community (as Leonardo Boff suggests).

Now, I'm not going to rehash the centuries of countless attempts to explain this ancient church teaching confirmed in the 3rd century. So let's suffice it to say that God is so much more than any way we could try to explain...God is bigger, more expansive and creative than we imagine God could be; and God is more loving, forgiving, and merciful than we might wish God would be. //

Basically the Divine Community of the Blessed Trinity is a mystery / that can't be fully comprehended by human reason, / but rather it's only glimpsed through faith. / Some call this community of three, who have always been together eternally, "Father, Son, Holy Spirit", others "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier", and yet others "Mother, Lover, Friend". In whatever limited human words we use to name them, what holds them together in perfect unity and is limitless, is love. //

*And speaking of love, have you ever loved someone so much it hurts? I mean you really loved them, maybe when you're sharing a meal with "the love of your life" and you just stare at them thinking, "God I love you" ..//*

*..or maybe in that moment when you tuck your kid in bed with a goodnight kiss and you pause for a moment before leaving giving thanks to God for that blessed (sometimes crazy) little being..//*

*..or maybe its in those quiet moments when you're by the side of a loved one who is sick and your love surrounds them in the deep sighs and mumbled prayers..//*

*..or maybe it's with your best friend, with whom you can be your total self and who shares with you those special God moments..//*

*..or maybe with tears in your eyes as you tell your aging parent that you love them and you hope to God that they remember you tomorrow..//*

*There's a love there...that holds nothing back...that holds you together in those encounters...that forms you into family...and somehow you're turned toward each other. //*

Within this Divine Community of the Trinity, there's a mutuality, a directness, with each of the Persons totally turned toward the others, and holding nothing back in a radical communion. / With the Blessed Trinity there is an eternal pouring forth, / one toward the other, / so much that they build a single movement of love and encounter. That's right, **love** is the glue that holds the Trinity together...love is the tension that pulls them together into one...love is the rhythm of the dance of the Trinity. //

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Theologian Anthony Gittins writes: ***To love you must encounter***. Some people *know about* many things and many people: they claim to know about the people from Africa or South America, about the poor or about those in prison. This knowledge is intellectual or general; but other people actually know someone from Africa or South America...someone who is hungry, thirsty, without clothes, homeless, sick, or imprisoned. This is experiential knowledge.

He says, “We can't truly know, much less love, in the abstract **because human encounter, meeting each other, is the only authentic way to know and to love**. Jesus's life and ministry...even his death and post-resurrection encounters are great examples of this love.

Gittins continues, “The point needs to be repeated for many of us who may be dedicated to people, but prevented from real encounters by the structure and shape of our lives. But **encounter (convivencia) is the only way to love...**”

Now, if we agree with Gittins that “*to love we must encounter*,” then we can better understand why God put on humanness and encountered us and loved us in Jesus, who is the face of love that saves, forgives, redeems, liberates, and keeps on encountering us. //

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You may know John 3:16 by heart...*for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life....* But do you know verse 17 by heart too? ...*that for indeed God didn't send the Son into the world to judge the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* // God's love has a saving purpose. This is a love so deep that it hurts. This love isn't hard to understand, it doesn't need a fancy doctrine...because it all boils down to three simple words...God + loves + you!

Yes, GOD LOVES YOU always has, always will, no matter what...and nothing can separate you from that love of God in Jesus. This love of the Trinity stares at you across meal after meal at Christ's table, saying "God I love you" ...watches you sleep and gives thanks for your life...whispers in your ear that you are loved and hopes you still remember it tomorrow. //

Through this trinitarian love, you and I are called to be part of what God is up to, God's mission in our community and in the world that God so loves. The Triune God is not only the perfect community, but is the maker of communities of love through us. And when we're gathered by the Spirit into one, we're fashioned into God's people, God's family.

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As Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "So then, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are citizens with the holy ones and also members of the kindred of God." As scholar Justo Gonzalez suggests, "for those who don't or can't live near their family, the Blessed Trinity creates the communion of saints, the holy community, the church to be that family of solidarity" where we can encounter the love of Trinity SO THAT we can pass it on to others who long to know God's love for them too. For in this world beloved by God, love wins...not in a pollyannaish kind of way, but rather as a resistance to the empires of hate and violence kind of way. //

We understand this mission of God in the world trinitarily: as God the Father-Mother sending the Son, and the Creator and Savior together sending the Spirit to make us holy..., but the sending movement doesn't stop there, for **the Triune God sends** all of us into the world to share these three liberating words "God + Loves + You". I mean, *what kind of world would we help usher in, if every person knew the whole truth that they, and everyone else, are loved by God?* //

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Our lives and our encounters are meant to proclaim this life-changing good news...that God's love for us in eternal life that has already begun... // your freedom to live in the love of the Trinity has already begun, you're already part of God's radically inclusive family! //

So on this Holy Trinity Sunday, as we breathe in God's abundant love and taste it as bread and wine, may we go forth into the beloved world, as streams of living justice. And in the words of that hymn:

Your city's built for music: we are the stones you seek.  
Your harmony is language. We are the words you speak.  
Our faith we find in service, our hope in other's dreams.  
Our love in hand of neighbour. Our homeland brightly gleams.

Inscribe our hearts with justice, your way – the path untried:  
Your truth – the heart of stranger, your life – the Crucified.