

Trinity Sunday Sermon: Interconnected Gratitude

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Romans 5:1-5

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I don't know about you but in my family takes time at our meals together to say grace, to thank God for the food and things happening in our life. Now there are many ways to say grace. You could sing about it like you learned at youth camp. You could say a little memorized prayer like the one I said growing up. One thing I have seen some people do is to try and name the many hands that were involved in preparing the food. Not just the cook but also the grocery people, the people at food processing plants, the truckers and especially the farmers and those who pick the food. When you take a moment to really consider how many people it takes to bring even one item to our table to eat it is quite amazing.

A man named AJ Jacobs was inspired by his son to do just that. He too had a practice of giving thanks at mealtime and would name some of the people who had a part in bringing the food they ate to their table. One day his son said, "you know dad, the people you are thanking are not in this apartment and can't hear you thanking them. If you were really cared you would tell them yourself." This sparked an idea and AJ decided to try and thank everyone who had a part in bringing his breakfast to the table. Realizing how difficult that would be he reduced the task to one item to make it manageable. Coffee, he wanted to thank all the people who handled the bag of coffee he made every morning.

Now I cannot go over the many people he wrote or visited but I do want you to know that it took him several months and over a thousand people he tracked down and thanked. He even did a TED Talk about it if you want to hear him tell the story. Search AJ Jacobs and TED Talk. AJ eventually went to Columbia to thank the people who grew the beans, the Guarnizo Brothers. These three brothers owned a small farm high up in the mountains of Columbia. They were amazed at him coming all that way from

New York to meet them and thank them for growing the beans that became his morning cup of jo. They showed him the trees that grew coffee beans and explained to him the process of caring for and harvesting the berries. What an experience to try and thank so many individuals who have a hand in bringing a simple cup of coffee to our homes.

One of the things that AJ learned from the experience was first how interconnected and interdependent our world really is. I think we all have a greater appreciation of that today after living through a global pandemic. We have all learned the term global supply chain and the surprising reality that so many things we take for granted can disappear in a matter of weeks if one aspect of this global supply chain shuts down. Toilet paper, beef, pork and chicken, medical supplies and even baby formula became harder to find at different points during the shut down and still even today we see it happening still.

When huge meat processing plants in the Midwest were hit hard by COVID and thousands of workers, mostly immigrants, became infected the plants could not keep up with demand. We saw the impact at the store, but farmers also felt the impact when slaughterhouses could not receive their livestock. We are still feeling this impact because of an ongoing worker shortage and still spikes in cases around the world that repeatedly interrupt production. I know I have become more grateful and patient with people in the service industry and anyone whom we called Essential workers, because they risked a lot to keep working. The production and service industries do not have a work remote option. They are essential, but too often we take them for granted. So let us practice gratitude for the many recognized people that impact our lives.

In today's reading from Romans 5 we see another form of gratitude. Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome preparing them for his visit and trying to instruct them in some of the theology behind salvation that the book of Romans discusses in depth. Now the concept of the Trinity that we find hints of in Scripture really was not fully considered during Paul's time, but he understood that there was God the creator, Jesus the

Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit- the sustainer or helper. It would take the church several more centuries to discuss and argue what it truly meant and even still today theologians, ministers and even your average church member will say it is a mystery. Three persons in one Holy divine God.

In this passage, Paul is describing the interconnectedness of God and each role that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit play in bringing people eternal life. The key English word for us here is the word “Through”. God is working through Jesus and Jesus is also working through the Holy Spirit and we are in turn sharing in the Glory of God and able to express the Love of God to one another through God’s love within us.

Paul here describes how it takes all of God – three persons – to bring us to oneness with the Divine. We are reconciled to God the creator who gives us peace. That peace is made possible by Jesus who offers us amazing, unmerited Grace. Through the promise of eternal life, we receive hope. Through the Holy Spirit we experience the love of God poured out upon our hearts that stirs us to share that hope with others. Many of our Christian symbols reflect this intertwining connection of the trinity such as the three interlocking circles or the triangle. Some use other concepts like the three forms of water – frozen, liquid and steam. All are H₂O but in three distinct forms. It does not fully explain the concept of the Trinity, but it helps us imagine how it could be possible

Simple right? HA – There is a reason we call the Trinity a mystery of faith. We may not be able to wrap our heads around it, but we see the evidence of it whenever we experience the power of forgiveness, the beauty and glory of creation or the hope of a better tomorrow. Even amid trial and persecution, like Paul experienced, we can experience an indescribable peace, joy and hope that our connection in God give us.

Paul’s writing and AJ’s experience raised their awareness of the interconnectedness of God and creation in so many ways. This awareness produces a profound heart of gratitude. But it also will raise awareness of the cost and impact that this relationship

has on others too. Gratitude cultivates compassion for what others do and the lives they lead. Compassion can also spur one into action to improve the lives of others. When AJ understood what it took to bring clean water to his home and how much of the world does not have that luxury he was spurred to support clear water work around the world.

Today is Trinity Sunday. We may not fully grasp this mystery of God, but we see that all of life is interconnected and interdependent. God dwells among us through Jesus and knows our suffering. The Holy Spirit gives us hope through the ongoing work of Healing and restoration of the wholeness of creation. We share in this with hearts of gratitude and compassion to spread the love of God and healing power of Christ to others.

Today we also celebrate the many people who contribute time, energy and talent for the life and ministry of this church so others may know the love of God. We would not be here without you. We give thanks to God for your unique and precious gifts and very being among us. You are cherished and loved.