

## **...Let Me Count the Ways...**

[Text -Matthew 28:16-20]

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In the United Church of Christ there are no set creeds or doctrines that serve as a “litmus test” for Church membership, primarily because we recognize that each person’s concept of the transcendent Holy One will probably vary. And while our denomination does value the Church’s historic creeds and doctrines, we also value the contemporary insights and interpretations that each person discovers and articulates for him or her self. So on this Holy Trinity Sunday, while I will talk about the Holy Trinity, my aim isn’t to try to explain or defend a Church *doctrine*; it’s to explore and celebrate the wonderful Divine *Relationships* which that doctrine seeks to convey.

The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity was an attempt by early Christians to explain the mystery of the intricate and intimate relationship between the Creator who initiates Life, the Christ who redeems our living, and the Holy Spirit who continues to inspire our lives every day. This Doctrine’s intent is to illuminate a Divine relationship and collaboration; yet it’s often been used to divide people of faith and to hinder the Divine desire for unity and wholeness. So this morning, heretic that I am, I say we forget about the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and focus instead on the marvelous, mystical, multi-layered relationships that this “Trinity” reveals and engenders.

Two-thousand years ago when Jesus talked about God, he shocked and angered many of the religious leaders around him. Rather than talking about a distant, demanding Deity, Jesus uses language and imagery that reveal One who is close and caring, intimate and loving. By calling God as *ABBA* [or “Papa”], Jesus evokes the image of a compassionate parent, whose primary

concern is for the well-being of His or *Her* children. For even though Jesus uses the term “Father,” he also understands the Divine Bearer of Life in a feminine form. “What *woman* among you, having ten precious coins, if losing one, will not diligently search the entire house until she finds it,” Jesus says. “And when she finds it, she calls her friends together to celebrate!” This is how the Holy One seeks those who are lost; and brings the community together to rejoice when they are found!

Jesus understands that *all* people - male *and* female, gay and straight, lesbian and transgender - *all* of us are created in the Divine Image. And everything in this entire Creation, even a falling sparrow, is highly valued by the Holy One who calls it all into being. In the Holy Trinity, we celebrate the Holy One as *Creator* - the Divine Source who not only starts the process, but Who continues to care for the complete cosmos, and the entire human family, at every moment in time.

Then, at one particular moment in time, Jesus the Christ - the Anointed One - comes to embody that Divine compassion and grace. Jesus lives his life as a True Child of God! And he recognizes in every other child of God the Sacred potential for compassion, goodness, and grace. Jesus welcomes *all* to the table to break bread - to share in Life’s celebration - because for him, there are no “outsiders” to the Divine Realm. In fact, he makes it a top priority to welcome those who society and religion often push-aside as outcasts.

Unfortunately, the religious establishment in Jesus’ day, not unlike many established religions today, fear this open and welcoming Spirit which Jesus embodies. They have their own dogmatic doctrines and rigid rules to determine who belongs, and who doesn’t - who is worthy, and who is not. Yet Jesus keeps breaking those rules:

He violates the Law of Sabbath rest, by working to heal those who are hurting - regardless of the day.

He touches the “untouchable” lepers, and warmly embraces the publically scorned sinners, prostitute and tax-collectors.

He defies the doctrine of treating foreigners or nonbelievers as enemies to be feared - boldly declaring “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus goes on to explain, and demonstrate, that our “neighbor” is *anyone* we meet: Male or Female - Religious or Secular - Mainstream or Minority - the Jewish victim of a robbery, or the “Good” Samaritan who stops to help.

In every facet of his life, Jesus finds a way to do the loving thing - because that is his nature - his *Divine* Nature. And even when his insistence that all be welcomed and included, leads to his own rejection, condemnation and crucifixion, Jesus continues to trust that the Divine Spirit of Life and Love will prevail. The message of Easter is that even when the worst possible things happen, the Divine Power of Life and Love ultimately triumphs! And when the time comes for Jesus to relinquish his earthly form, the Divine Essence of his Life and Love doesn't die; it disperses and grows and multiplies in and through all those who follow his gracious Way.

The gracious Spirit of Divine Wisdom [*Sophia* in the Greek] - Who is present at the beginning; Who lives and loves in and through Jesus Christ - continues to live and thrive in our world today - calling you and me to live and thrive as genuine children of our One Divine Source. This Holy Spirit *inspires* us - breathes into us - the power to be compassionate, Christ-like people. And by the presence of this Spirit within us and around us, you and I are energized to faithfully carry-forward Christ's ministry: To feed the hungry, heal the sick, stand-up for the oppressed and the “outsiders”, and to joyfully proclaim the Good News of Divine welcome to *all* people!

The Divine Spirit who lovingly brings this Creation to Life, who personifies that life and love in the person of Jesus Christ, is the same Holy Spirit who calls us *all* into multiple Holy and wholesome relationships - in our families, our Church Family, our communities, wherever we may be. To me, experiencing and celebrating these healthy, wholesome relationships is a lot more interesting and fulfilling than trying to understand - or defend - an ancient Church doctrine. And if this makes me a happy heretic, then so be