

Gloria Dei Meditation

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Genesis 1:1-2:4

Psalms 8

II Corinthians 13:11-13

Matthew 28:16-20

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Last Sunday, we celebrated the birthday of Christ's body here on earth. It was a great and majestic service with brass and choir and liturgical dancers and hymnody of power and joy. The dust has settled. We remember the story. We cherish the promise of the Holy Spirit leading and empowering us to be Christ's body. We got it, but we don't get it.

Today's celebration, Trinity Sunday, seems to be all about God. We worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity. After the Hymn of the Day, we will read responsively the entire Athanasian Creed. It is used in the liturgy of many churches on this one Sunday of the year. The creed addresses the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology – what the church believes about the life and work of Jesus the Christ.

But as we turn to the scriptures of today, we find that their focus is not so much on the Trinity as upon those who are **the church**. By insisting that we insert ourselves into the work of the Trinity, the scriptural witness would have us answer the questions that come to every man, woman and child at some time in their earthly journey: Who are we? Why are we here? What are we to do with what we have received? Today's scriptures want to make sure that we really **got** what happened when **the church** was given life and power and hope on the Day of Pentecost.

The Genesis account of creation is a beautiful telling of the Trinity in its Unity creating a world of diversity and goodness. Humanity, also created diverse and good, is steward of this creation, here to care and love and manage it. A rather large ball has been hit into our court. Life is **not a spectator** sport. **We** are in the game. **You** are in the game. You need to **get** that.

The Psalmist, a spectator of the night sky, was overwhelmed. Had he seen through today's telescopes and space satellites, he'd perhaps be even more overwhelmed but likely ponder the same questions: "Who am I? Who am I that God even considers me? I must be very special to God. Each person must be very special to God, created to be almost like God. I must be important to this God of creation. All people must be important to this God of creation."

It's a message God constantly repeats, as when the apostle Paul planned his return to Corinth. He had already brought the gospel message to them, and now returned to build up the church, to cheer them on, to encourage them to continue being faithful. His letter announces his coming and his desire to see a church of Jesus Christ who **got** it before, and **continues** to get it. So he tells them, in love, "Mend your ways, live in peace, agree with one another, and the God of love and peace will be with you." Doesn't that sound like other letter writers in the church? Isn't that the message of John? "This is how people will know if you love God: 'You will **love** one another.'" Oh, please! Yes, oh, please.

While my mother was a resident of the Presbyterian Manor, we'd visit most every day, and you knew when the state auditors were about to visit, sort of like Paul visiting the church in Corinth. There was sudden **attention** to every detail: noticing every Kleenex dropped on the floor and **picking it up**, verifying every medical record had up-to-date nursing notes, and confirming that every medicine was being given at the proper time in the proper amount. As the visit neared, you'd hear the head nurse or administrator of the home remind everybody, "You all know the drill. Let's **do** it."

Paul was like that, telling the church then and the church now, "You know the drill. You also know the promise: The God of love and peace will be with you." **Do** it.

When Jesus gave the great commission to his disciples in Galilee, the full authority of the Godhead was placed in our hands to go into the world and make disciples: not merely baptizing, but inviting, teaching, loving, encouraging, holding up, praying for, rescuing, healing, forgiving, walking with, commiserating with, giving a hand up, forming a community like no other. And he ended the commission with this promise: "I will be **with you** always. I am going away from you here, but by going away from here, I can be **with you** everywhere. And that is my promise. I will **never** leave you." In that Great Commission, God reminds us that the ball is in our hands. This is **not** a spectator sport. You are in the game, and Jesus reminds you it's a **team** sport. You are **not** alone.

What do we do with a God who will **not** leave us alone? What do we do with a God who, in the deepest despairs of life, doesn't *visit ... occasionally*, but is **always here**? What do we do with a God who, in the shambles which we sometimes make of our lives, taps us on the shoulder to remind us, "I'm **here**. Take my hand. This is not the end. I have more life for you. Come on, let's go." And God lifts us up as if we have the wings of eagles and we soar once again.

On this Trinity Sunday, reexamine every relationship you have, the ones closest to you **and** the ones farther away. **Each** person you know is important to God. And each person you do **not** know is important to God. How are you treating God's creation? How are you treating others?

The message of the Blessed Trinity is that **every** relationship is blessed. I'm not sure we get it. We know that God is with **us**. We see that lived out in **our** lives. The challenge seems to be in fully understanding that **every** person, like you, is created, blessed, loved and important to God ... and that our commission is to obey **everything** commanded, which includes loving your neighbor as yourself. Develop more loving relationships with **every** other person. **That's** the drill.

Following God **redefines** what we must do. One of the most important things to do is to show-up, because **being-with** is the only remedy for loneliness, which is far more profound than people usually admit. We must be-with others in **their** times of need. We must divide grief and multiply joy by being present when **others** experience loss. Don't wait for a personal invitation. Drop everything and go. You know the drill.

I could tell you the story of a man who visits his wife with Alzheimer's in the nursing home most every day. She may not know him, but he knows her. He knows the drill. Or the widow who attended every funeral I ever officiated because "everyone needs someone at their funeral." But instead I tell

you about a doctor in England whose job was to show-up when dying was near, and **what he learned** from one memorable **relationship**.

“Perhaps it is only when you have worked in a hospice that you truly appreciate ... that it is not death which people fear but the manner of dying, whether it be the pain or the fear or, we are often told, the **loneliness**. [This story] begins with me sitting beside a lovely old lady shortly after she had been admitted from her beautiful little apartment where we had cared for her for a few weeks. Now too frail to remain there alone, but very comfortable and without any of the pain and anguish she had had when first we met, she was now settling in to her new and final home. I asked her how I as her new doctor could help her, knowing as I did that she was not likely to have much physical suffering. Her answer took me by surprise.

‘Young Man,’ she said, ‘I have mixed feelings about what lies ahead. If you can spare me a few minutes let me try to explain what I mean.’

‘A bit of me is excited, in fact very excited, just as you feel when you’ve seen a holiday place advertised in one of those glossy brochures but never been there and, more to the point, never ever met anyone who has. It’s also a curious feeling when **you’ve only got a single** and not a return ticket because you know for certainty **you’re not coming back!** The other thing I have to tell you is that I’ve had my bag packed for a very long time. Now that’s a curious feeling too. It’s a little bit like British Rail. You know the train will come but **when** is another matter altogether! You know it’s no use asking anyone because no-one knows any better than you do!’

‘However, that is not the biggest trial I am facing, waiting for my train. Believe me, waiting on **this platform is a very, very lonely** experience even when the brochure said it was a nice place I’m going to, even when you have a ticket and even when you’ve been ready for the journey for a long time.

‘You very kindly asked in what way you could help me. Well, let me explain so that you will understand. I am finding this **the loneliest time in my life**. I’m **surrounded** by nice people and everyone is so kind, **but I’m still lonely** and just a little frightened because’ ‘I’ve never done this before, you must remember. Until that train comes in ... Well, I would love you to **stand beside me**. For that you’ll need to purchase a platform ticket! Now do you understand? No, perhaps you don’t because you are too young.’

‘When I was young they only allowed you to go on to a platform if you had a ticket for the train or if you had a platform ticket so that you could **wait with your loved one** or friend. They only cost a penny, in the old money of course, but what a joy it was to **stand together** a little longer at such little cost. I suspect **we all like someone with us** when we go off on a long journey, don’t you think? I see you understand now.’

Each day when I went to see her she just shook her head and told me I was not needed. Days and days went by. Then one day, when she looked no different to me, she whispered ‘**Have you got your platform ticket?**’ I reassured her that I had and carried it with me wherever I went. She invited me to **come and sit beside** her, **which I did**.

‘Oh what a curious feeling to be so lonely and at the same time so excited’ she explained. ‘We don’t need to talk, you know, but **I need to know that** as that train comes in **you’ll stay beside me** until I tell you. That’s the point when I shall have to leave go of your hand and take that last step on my own. I

know I'll manage ***if you are near me.***'

It is difficult to describe atmosphere and ambience. ***Sitting with*** that lady was to experience a ***peace*** that is so rare in life. I think other doctors would agree with me that we are trained to talk but now how to remain silent. We are taught how to explain but not how to listen. We are taught how to be energetic but never how to restore peace and tranquility by our inactivity. We are taught nothing of inner peace, nor of loneliness, and nothing whatsoever of the power of love and ***undemanding companionship***. Those minutes which followed were some of life's richest for me.

'At last!' She turned to me and smiled. Her thin hand squeezed mine as she whispered 'Sometimes we need doctors and sometimes we need friends. It's best of all when our doctors are also our friends. ***Thank you, dear, for being my friend.*** You cannot come any further but don't worry. I can manage now.'

Her grip loosened. I turned and looked at her. She had never moved. On her thin, lined face there was a hint of a smile. She was dead.

I sat for a few minutes pondering what had just happened. I thought back to the years I had spent training as a physician, taught by brilliant men who never mentioned platform tickets or the many other skills I now found I needed, ministering to the dying. I had been taught how to teach and how to speak, not how to listen and how to hear what was really being said in myriad ways.

I had been told about anxiety and the distress it can cause but given no insights into the crushing power of ***terror***. Never had I appreciated that ***loneliness***, rather than aloneness, was like a cancer which ***seemed to suffocate***. No one had told me that ***love*** can at one time be healing, and at another be dangerous and damaging unless it is ***totally self-denying***.

I looked around me at a world with which I thought I was very familiar and where I felt at home, the inside of a hospice, looking in most respects little different from any small, homely hospital. Familiar and safe to me, but ***what does it feel like to a person who knows*** it is their life's departure lounge? What makes a place safe for one and ***frightening to another?*** I registered that as a question to be answered, as something highlighted by the hospice but probably relevant wherever we care for [***people***]. ... Do [***people***] need something we have not ***got*** to give them?

One day I too would be waiting for my train, ... and, I was ***anxious*** to know, ***would there be people there with their platform ticket?*** Perhaps that was up to me, I thought. As someone brought up in the Christian church my mind went back to the story of ***Jesus in the Garden*** of Olives the night before His execution. ***What He*** had ***most*** wanted and ***hoped*** for, but ***did not get***, was for His disciples to stay awake and ***keep Him company*** on what must have been the ***loneliest*** night of His life.

You know the drill. Love one another.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.