

**“Marching On”**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Victoria ByRoade**  
**Trinity Sunday**  
**Sunday, May 30, 2010**  
**Scripture: John 16:12-15**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:** *Gracious God, as we hear and think about your word to us today, quiet any voices in our minds, that we might hear only your voice. And then, after having heard your word, help us live as you would have us live. Amen.*

Since, as I mentioned earlier, today is Trinity Sunday, it is not surprising that all of our texts point to God-in-three. Today is the day Christians around the world take time to consider one of the greatest doctrines of our faith: the magnificence and mystery of divinity that is three-in-one – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If you know your church history, or if you have been hanging around churches long enough to have heard other Trinity Sunday sermons, you know that the Trinity has been one of the thorniest thickets, one of the trickiest subjects in the history of Christianity. It was hashed out by theologians and church elders centuries ago and yet is still argued over every few decades. So although when we sing the Doxology, when we “praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” the triune nature of the Godhead isn’t something too many of us consider as part of the daily expression of our faith.

But it is. At least it should be. For that’s the kind of faith, hope and love for which this world is hungering. God as Holy Spirit, is what keeps our faith fresh and makes it possible to rebirth Christ into the world every day. God as Holy Spirit enables us to share that faith, hope and love with the world.

I heard a story in a sermon many years ago – strange that I can’t remember who preached it or even where I was – but I do remember the story. It was about a high school

student who was seriously burned in a car accident. It was touch and go as to whether he would live or die. The boy’s high-school English teacher didn’t know how bad his burns were, just that she didn’t want him to fall behind in his homework. So she arranged for a tutor to go to the hospital and work with him on what the class was studying – irregular verbs and dangling participles.

When the English teacher finally went to see her student, she was horrified. She found him still in the critical care unit. He was totally wrapped in white gauze. He could only move his mouth, and that only barely. She couldn’t believe she had been so insensitive as to send him a tutor to help him learn “irregular verbs and dangling participles.”

But on the way out, the head nurse said: “You’ve worked a miracle with that boy. You know that, right?” The teacher said, “I’m so embarrassed at what I did...sending him a tutor. How could I have done such a thing?”

“No,” the nurse said. “You saved his life. He had been so depressed and unresponsive; we didn’t know whether he would live or not. He had given up. He was just lying there, waiting to die. But then the tutor came, and suddenly his attitude changed completely. He started talking. Now he is working with us. He is fighting back, and is beginning to respond to treatment. Now, we believe he’s going to make it.”

The teacher had no idea what the nurse was talking about. But after the boy was released from the hospital, he explained himself why the tutor had made such a difference. He said, “They told me I would live, but I didn’t believe them. I thought they were just saying that because they didn’t want to tell me the truth. But when the tutor came in, it made all the difference. I realized that you wouldn’t send a tutor to work with a dying boy on irregular verbs and dangling participles!”

The world needs to know that it can live, that there is hope for its future. Love is an action. Love is a verb. Whether our actions are one on one, or ministry to a group, we can make all the difference.

Thursday I was invited to be a part of the graduation ceremony for our Preschool’s VPK program. Ours is not the only school which will soon be finished for the summer. But while the kids might be able to live in the world of summer vacation when they can swim, ride bikes, and play video games, we adults will still be living in another world. There is the economy and the struggle to keep Wall Street and Main Street happy and accountable at the same time. There are budget cuts affecting 80% of school districts in this country while we work to improve education nationwide. There is the oil spill in the Gulf Coast and the finger pointing and blame game that has accompanied that terrible accident. If there is one thing I have learned in life it is that everybody has their own version of the truth.

Our reading this morning from John’s gospel is a part of Jesus’ larger farewell speech during which he summarizes his key teachings, empowers his disciples by calling them friends, and promises that God will send them the Spirit of “truth” to guide them. Actually, what Jesus promised was that when Spirit comes he would guide them into “all truth.” Think about those words of Jesus. “All Truth”. Then he prays for his friends and for the world. Jesus’ conversation with his friends is an important moment in which he tells them and us that he was trusting us to carry his ministry forward after he is gone.

Throughout his ministry, the Gospel of John has shown Jesus trying and failing to prepare his disciples for his eventual arrest and crucifixion. Now, in this intimate, final conversation, he alludes not only to his fast-approaching death and the persecution that would soon fall on his friends, but he speaks, as well, of his disciples’ future ministries

During their ministry with Jesus, the disciples had been in places like this before, suddenly thrown by a surprising turn of events or by an unexpected word from Jesus. Their questions often illustrated their confusion about the direction in which Jesus was heading or the importance of what they were doing. And yet, in each and every situation, at each and every turn, Jesus had always been present to lead them forward. But this time Jesus tells them he will not be with them. Jesus knew that once he had been crucified, the disciples would be tempted to think that that they had made a mistake in following him. So instead of just instructing them to “carry on”, he promises that the Spirit will come to them and guide them. While in the past Jesus has led his friends to a greater understanding of God’s love and of God’s purpose, now the Spirit will continue to lead them forward through the one thing Jesus cannot: his death.

As we come to our gospel reading for today, what the disciples have yet to learn is that Jesus did not just speak to them of true things. Jesus *was* the truth about how God is in the world. And that truth must include the way of God’s dying – and of God’s rising again. But if Jesus not only speaks the truth but *is* the truth of how God is in the world, what does it mean for this truth to be put to death? Can death kill truth?

Martin Luther King said in one of his speeches that, “Truth crushed to earth will rise again.” The powers of this world may try to kill truth, but in the end, truth will triumph. King believed in the goodness of God and of humanity. He believed that when people came to know the truth, they would endeavor to change that which works against the truth.

Dr. King saw truth as ever “marching on” not only as a force for change but also the goal toward which we aspire. This understanding of truth’s persistence and lure has motivated enormous and important changes in our world and in human relationships. In the last years of his life, Dr. King talked about moving from the era of civil rights to one of human rights, because the truths he had come to know in his struggle for the

rights of African Americans allowed him to see the interconnectedness of violence, poverty, racism and injustice.

The Gospel of John makes it clear that something unusually powerful was afoot in Jesus’ ministry. Hopes were raised and thousands of people were healed and brought into community. But it is also apparent in the words of John’s gospel that crucifixion was the certain destination of Jesus – certain because being the *truth* of God in the world guaranteed that in the end, he would be vulnerable before all those whose power in the world is threatened by *truth* and called into question by God’s love.

We Christians don’t just believe in “God” or “Spirit.” We believe in the Incarnation. We believe that God became flesh and moved in with us. God has a face, a name, Jesus Christ. God doesn’t just love us. Rather, God comes to us, speaks, reveals, and reaches out to us when all the while we thought we were reaching out to God.

I think you know this already. That’s why you are here this morning. You are here in church, not for a philosophical lecture, not for a listing of all the benefits of the Christian faith. You are here hoping to be met by the Word Made Flesh, the truth of God in the world. True worship, in the name of the God we call Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is always incarnational, personal, and embodied.

Ours is a faith which affects how we make our way in the world – how we interact with each other and with the world God created. Ours is a faith which calls us to a life of forever “marching on”. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

*Thank to William Willimon for his sermon, “The Personification of God”, Leonard Sweet for his sermon, “A Sunday Kind of Love”, Brett Blair for his sermon, “Truth – How Do You Know It When You Hear It?” and Noelle Damico for her sermon, “The Unfinished Business of Truth”.*

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