

Sermon, *Trinity Sunday and Memorial Day*
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels by the Sea, 5.26.24

I have figured something out: when Ash Wednesday falls on Valentines Day, the whole Church calendar will make it ripe for preaching because when Ash Wednesday and Valentines Day are on the same day, St. Patrick's Day lands on a Sunday. Ascension Sunday and Mother's Day land together on a Sunday. And, Trinity Sunday and Memorial Day weekend land together. This whole year, I have been stretched as a preacher to come up with themes that incorporate both the secular and sacred calendar. As such, let me start by saying this: Happy Trinity Sunday. And, Happy Memorial Day Weekend. Let's see what these two themes have in common.

Starting with Trinity Sunday, our opening prayer talks of the Unity of Three-in-One. We celebrate the Unity of the Trinity. There are three distinctive heads, or facets, or images of God – Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Yet, they are One. And they are Unity. I'd like to focus on the Unity of God because, to be frank, our communities and our nation, and our world, needs more unity right now. The Godhead is unity, so let's use the gift of the Holy Spirit and find unity with one another.

Because it's Trinity Sunday, I am going to give you three different models of unity. The first one is unity in defining what you are not. An example of this is the phrase the enemy of my enemy is my friend. The unity, or friendship, exemplified here is based on what you are not – an enemy. Maybe you have run into people in your life who define themselves, and who they unify with, based on what they are not. They might say, "Well, I'm not a Democrat," or, "I'm not a Republican." Or, "I don't believe in the ordination of women; or of any Bible translation that is not King James." Okay, but what are you, one might ask. They identify with people who also are not what others are. If God were to define the God-self in what is not God, well, that might be a small God. Thankfully the Trinity doesn't define itself in what it is not.

The second model of unity is one that has a unifying statement of belief; a creed, or manifesto, or something along that line. For this model, everyone who is unified has the same set of beliefs. Once you are in, you know that everyone else thinks the same way about whatever it is that is incorporated into the belief statement. The discussion groups this past week talked about a guest essay in the Wall Street Journal written by a Roman Catholic priest who is also a professor of economics in Ontario Canada. In this piece, the author believes the Roman Catholic faith system is unity based on a shared set of beliefs, and, once someone does not agree with one piece, they do not belong in that faith system. Specifically, the essay argued that the President of the U.S. believes what Pope Francis believes about migration and immigration but disagrees with the pontiff on issues around pregnancy. Since they disagree on that topic, the U.S. President is a so-called "Cafeteria Catholic" which means he gets to pick and choose what he believes like a buffet line. As the article goes, the author calls out all people of the Roman faith that the "Pope has closed the cafeteria" and that either you believe the whole set or you are not unified in faith.

Thankfully, there is a third way of unity. I'm a part of the Episcopal Church which is a part of the Anglican Communion, or Anglican Church as some call it. We are the second largest religious organization in the world, behind the Roman Catholic Church. We got so big because as the British Empire grew, so did the Church. When the English government was planted, so was the Anglican Church. It was said at one point that the sun never set on the British Empire. It can also be said the sun never sat on the Anglican Church either. As time went on, the empire shrank,

countries received, or fought for, their independence. But her Church remained. We are in Alaska, South Africa, Hong Kong and New Zealand, and points in between. What hold us together in communion with one another is not a shared list of beliefs but rather a three-fold unity. We believe in common prayer. As a Church body, we may disagree on a variety of things, but, we believe in being together in prayer. We believe common prayer is how we find unity with one another and with God. We believe we are commanded in Scripture, and particularly by Jesus, to pray. It's our first step in unity.

The second step is from our Anglican moral theology is service to others. The first step is common prayer the second step – service – believes that prayer motivates us to serve God. Prayer shapes us. Prayer brings us to serve one another. You have heard it said that faith will move mountains. The Anglican question is whether the mountain moved or the person with faith was moved. We tend to believe that it is the person that is moved. I watched Mt. Saint Helens explode (May 18th, 1980). South of St. Helens is Crater Lake in Oregon. That lake used to be a mountain; but it exploded and then filled with water. Moving mountains is a natural event. But, moving a person, moving their mindset or their belief, moving someone to think outside of themselves and help someone else without getting anything in return – that's faith, that's prayer and that faith, prayer and service all in one.

Our first step in unity is prayer. The second step is service to other – known as charity. The third step is love. Love is what keeps us in unity with one another. It begins with prayer, then service, then love. It doesn't begin by defining what we are not and finding unity there. It doesn't begin by first believing a whole set of things, like the Nicene Creed, but first starting with the basics of common prayer. Then letting one's prayer move them to service/charity. Then, having one's heart moved by love for both God and for one another. Then, the Nicene Creed makes sense; not before (I mean how could it if not moved by prayer to service and then to love).

So that's Trinity Sunday. But what about Memorial Day weekend. How does that fit into the Trinity?

For my (required) clinical pastoral education, I was a chaplain at the Veterans Administration hospital in Palo Alto, California in 2005. Back then, the U.S. was involved in two wars – Afghanistan and Iraq. We were making progress in Afghanistan but in 2005, we were losing ground in Iraq because of a change of tactics against our forces – namely, the improvised explosion devices, called IEDs. Military hospitals in Germany and the east coast of the US were being overwhelmed with injuries so the VA in Palo Alto converted to an active-duty military hospital. It changed everything, including the chaplaincy. Today, I am reminded of the services for those killed in the line of duty. I am thinking of James Greene. He was not in the news for his heroism. But, on Memorial Day, I think of him as representative of all those who died in our armed forces. James was in the U.S. Army. He was a good and skilled Humvee driver. His role at the time was to drive on what was the most dangerous road in the world – a seven mile stretch from inside Baghdad to the airport. On that particular day, he was a part of a convoy. Alone in his Humvee, he was packed to the ceiling with supplies; directly behind him was a troop carrier full of injured that was headed to the hospital in Germany. Those at his memorial said Jimmy could see where the IEDs were placed. On this particular day, on a curve in the road that the carrier would have to take wide, he saw it. In a split second he decided to accelerate and drive his vehicle over the top. His action took his life and saved many lives behind him.

At the memorial, his chaplain spoke. He spoke in terms of prayer, service and love. He said that everyone who enlists in the U.S. military begins a prayer to the American people and to our constitution – that they will protect and defend. It's a prayer that for some get answered with the ultimate price. The prayer that U.S. service men and women begin leads them to service – to serve the constitution and to serve other men and women in uniform. Those who enter the prayer and those who serve one another do not have to agree with how the constitution is interpreted, or the amendments. The unity of our Armed Forces is the prayer and service offered to one another. And, that service leads to love; and that love, as defined by Jesus who said the greatest love is to lay down one's life for one's friends.

For Memorial Day, we are called on to remember those who gave of themselves, out of love for country, constitution. We are to remember their sacrifice that began with what the chaplain called the prayer to the American people that leads to service that leads to love.

As we head further into the 21st century, I am being convinced that the Trinity, the Unity of God, is not calling for the Church to find unity by naming who we are not. The Unity is not calling for the Church to create a unifying list of things we believe, or should believe in; no, I am convinced that unity in this century that will lead us into the 22nd century is that of finding common prayer, of letting prayer move us to service and charity, and that service leads us to love God and our neighbor.

On this holy day and this remembrance weekend, I am going to ask you to pray with me. Please turn to page 838 in the Book of Common Prayer. Let us offer our prayers for the nation and I will conclude with a prayer for Heroic service.

Almighty God Giver of all good things we thank you for the natural majesty and beauty of this land they restore us though we often destroy them. *Heal us.*

We thank you for the great resources of this nation they make us rich though we often exploit them. *Forgive us.*

We thank you for the men and women who have made this country strong they are models for us though we often fall short of them. *Inspire us.*

We thank you for the torch of liberty which has been lit in this land it has drawn people from every nation though we often have hidden from its light. *Enlighten us.*

We thank you for the faith we have inherited and all its rich variety it sustains our life though we often have been faithless again and again. *Renew us.*

Help us, Lord, to finish the good work here begun, strengthen our efforts to blot out ignorance and prejudice and to abolish poverty and crime and hasten the day when all our people with many voices and one united chorus will glorify your holy name. *Amen*

O Judge of the Nations we remember before you with grateful hearts the men and women of our country who in the day of decision ventured much for the liberties we now enjoy. Grant that we may not rest until all the people of this land share the benefit of true freedom and gladly accept its disciplines, this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord. *Amen.*