

Wesley United Methodist Church

June 15, 2014

"Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28:16-20

A ridiculous story has been making the rounds once again. Many of you have heard it, but I wonder if you have caught its religious significance. It is about a pilot and three passengers, a boy scout, a priest, and an atomic scientist on a plane that develops engine trouble in mid flight. The pilot rushed back to the passengers and exclaims, "The plane is going down! We only have three parachutes, and there are four of us! I have a family waiting for me at home. I must survive!" With that, he grabs one of the parachutes and jumps out of the plane. The atomic scientist jumps to his feet at this point and declares, "I am the smartest man in the world. It would be a great tragedy if my life was snuffed out!" With that, he also grabs a parachute and exits the plane. With an alarmed look on his face the priest says to the boy scout, "My son, I have no family. I am ready to meet my maker. You are still young with much ahead of you. You take the last parachute." At this point, the boy scout interrupts the priest, "Hold on, Father, Don't say anymore. We're all right. The world's smartest man just jumped out of the plane wearing my knapsack!"

There are a lot of smart people today, successful people, affluent people, but they are jumping out of airplanes wearing knapsacks instead of parachutes.

Today we're celebrating Father's Day, and we're also celebrating Holy Trinity: God, the Father, God, the Son, God, the Holy Spirit.

Yes, it is true that the word Trinity can't be found in the Bible, nor in the writings of the early church fathers until the third century after Christ's resurrection. It is a manmade formula but it is based upon sound biblical faith. The Trinity, well understood, meets the deepest needs that we have in terms of our understanding of God.

We see God, first of all, as the creator and sustainer of life. God the Father: This is the God who spoke and the world was created. This is the God who guides the stars, who rules the heavens, who orders the planets in their orbits. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Lawgiver and Judge. This is God in his authority, the God whose ways are not our ways, the God whose glory is told by the heavens. For many of us, however, this God seems far removed from us, out of touch with our needs and our concerns.

Somehow God frightens us, and puts us off. And so, God revealed himself in the gently, compassionate Son called Jesus, who cradled children in his arms, and treated all persons with dignity and respect. In Jesus, the Son, we are exposed to the approachable side of God, the God who would lay down his own life in behalf of all the creatures he had formed out of the clay of the earth. God the Father, God the Son.

But there is a third partner to the Trinity--for many of us a silent partner. The work of the Holy Spirit has caused more controversy in the Christian community than any other issue in our theology. It is a controversy that actually precedes the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost by many centuries. In the midst of the Exodus experience, two leaders of Israel (Eldad & Medad), have the Spirit come upon them, according to the TO narrative, and start prophesying. Joshua, is horrified and wants to restrain them. Wise old Moses, however, disagrees. His response to Joshua is: "I wish all were prophets and that all had the Spirit come upon them."

I heard about a preacher who announced to his congregation that the Holy Spirit had come upon him, convicted him, and told him to leave for Africa and be a missionary to the heathen. A woman in the audience shouted, "That wasn't the Holy Spirit, that was your ex-wife."

The Holy Spirit is that presence in our lives that allows us to get our lives together, to achieve spiritual discipline and direction, to take charge of our lives and channel them in ways that glorify God and enrich the world. The Holy Spirit is the inward evidence, the indwelling presence, that which allows us to totally surrender our lives. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us peace and assurance to cope with life's demands. Again we turn to the OT and find in I Samuel 16:25 that when the Spirit left King Saul, Saul was filled with depression and fear. It is the Holy Spirit that gives a lift to our lives and helps us stand on higher ground. A father and child once stood looking at the beautiful picture of Christ standing at the door knocking. After a moment of thought, the father said, "I wonder why they don't let him in?" The child considered this and then replied, "The reason they don't let him in is that they are down in the cellar and they can't hear him knocking." It is the Holy Spirit that lifts us out of the cellars of life by giving the assurance of the power and purpose of God.

A doting father used to sing his little children to sleep. He even learned a few lullabies to lend some variety to the task. This was something he could do at night to help his wife out. And he kept up this task until one night he overheard his four-year-old give her younger sibling this advice, "If you pretend you're asleep," she said, "he stops." That was the end of the lullabies. Today we also honor our fathers. To be a good father, means to pray that the Holy Spirit will give the gifts needed. Even to sing lullabies. No sure if the Holy Spirit was with this dad when he was singing.

Father's Day goes back to "a Sunday morning in May of 1909, when a woman named Sonora Smart Dodd was sitting in church in Spokane, Wash. listening to a Mother's Day sermon. She thought of her father who had raised her and her siblings after her mother died in childbirth, and she thought that fathers should get recognition, too. So she asked the minister of the church if he would deliver a small sermon honoring fathers on her father's birthday, which was coming up in June, and the minister did. And the tradition of Father's Day caught on, though rather slowly. Mother's Day became an official holiday in 1914; Father's Day not until 1972. Mother's Day is still the busiest day of the year for florists, restaurants and long distance phone companies. Father's Day is the day on which the most collect phone calls are made.

A conscientious father can do wonders in the lives of his children. Many of us have observed this in our own families. A conscientious Dad can have a wondrous impact on the lives of his offspring.

Now Jesus is not talking about fatherhood in the passage of Matthew, He asks us to go and make disciples and serve him with the help of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Isn't this the very first area in which we participate in our calling to be faithful Christians? It is also evident in the raising of our children. Raising good children with the help of Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that they will also hear the great commission and do likewise.