“Both/And God”

A sermon for Trinity and Refugee Sunday

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As I was contemplating the juxtaposition of Trinity Sunday and Refugee Sunday in preparation for this sermon, I was reminded again of my time with the children at our last Children’s Eucharist….an experience I preached about a month or so ago. For those of you who weren’t here for that sermon, apropos of nothing, really, in the middle of the Children’s Eucharist one child called for a vote. By a show of hands, he wanted to know who present thought that Jesus and God were the same, and who thought that Jesus and God were different. More hands went up for the understanding that Jesus and God are different, but a few popped up in support of the understanding that Jesus and God are the same. The vote moderator was in the process of declaring victory for the former, when he was interrupted by another child who said, “Well, I kinda think Jesus and God are the same AND they are different.” Whoa. The room went quiet. This child, in the language of my seminary, was “queering” the space—breaking up the binary—the “either/or” and calling for a “Both/And”….

Our young moderator, in a humbling show of wisdom and generosity, agreed to retake the vote with this third, mind-bending option. The re-vote went down as it had the first time—the “Jesus and God are different” won the day…but the both/and option got two hearty votes—one from the child who proposed it…and one from me.

And this option also got the vote of the church, centuries ago when it sought to hammer out the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not have deep biblical roots. All three members are present in the biblical text, of course…and in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus sends the apostles out to baptize all nations explicitly in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit…but any detailed description of how the three relate to each other came together far after Jesus’ death out of a desire to refute what many in the early church felt were heretical understandings of God, Jesus, and the Spirit.

Different early Church camps were arguing back and fort with one another—some believed that Jesus was God…that God shape-shifted into the person of Jesus to carry out God’s mission. Others vehemently disagreed, figuring that a supreme and all-powerful God would never deign to become human, especially to suffer as humanity does and Jesus did. Instead, they argued that Jesus was a one-of-a-kind, really amazing person, but fully human.

To resolve it all, ecumenical councils were held gathering the early church leaders…This is where we get our creeds. And what did the early Church affirm? Well, they, affirmed the “queering” of Christian doctrine! They affirmed the both/and of God…Jesus was both human AND divine….Jesus and God are the same AND Jesus and God are different!

ONE God. but two persons—Father and Son…. (eventually expanded to three persons with the Spirit)

One God—UNIFIED…OF THE SAME SUBSTANCE

But three persons—DISTINCT in their roles and in their ways of being in and with Creation.

BOTH…AND

The creeds can seem so distancing…full of such specific detail as to be deadening litmus tests of faith…But what I love about Trinity Sunday is that I am reminded that at their heart, they affirm quite the opposite…they affirm the vastness of God…

the ultimately incomprehensible reality that all things are possible in God—things that seem exclusive, become simulteanously possible…both one AND the other existing and thriving all at the same time. The creeds affirm wonder and searching and the luring invitation from God to see and experience far outside of what our minds can make sense of.

Our readings on this Trinity Sunday invite us into that same expansive thinking about God that our Creeds can, if we center ourselves in their intent…Rather than a limited description of the Trinity, in our readings this morning we get a delicious breadth and depth of words to describe one or another aspect of the Trinity and faith:

UNITY

WISDOM

SUFFERING

ENDURANCE

CHARACTER

HOPE

And TRUTH, to name just a few.

These words are *both* liberating *and* challenging—we have wisdom AND we have suffering…

These words are *both* graspable now *and* aspirational…we have endurace AND we have truth…

These words are *both* personal *and* communal…we have character AND we have hope….

This is the Trinitarian understanding of God! *Both* meeting us where we are *and* somehow also stretching us beyond where we are comfortable. *Both* holding the pain of our suffering *and* somehow inviting the hope of liberation.

This is the God that we are invited to proclaim to the world! We are in a time in this country and in the world where we are again, just like when the Creeds were developed, needing to reclaim an expansive God…affirming that God is not the limited and limiting God that other, louder Christian and other religious folk have proclaimed. We need to return to our roots and claim once again the BOTH/AND, mind-bending God of our creeds—not quietly to ourselves only on Sunday mornings…but out in the world.

This is the God who needs to be proclaimed to those fleeing war and deprivation…to those who have left home behind and find themselves on seemingly endless exodus-like journeys searching for refuge….To those who wait at our borders or languish in our detention centers…even to those who take sanctuary in our churches….

This is the God who needs to be proclaimed *both* to those who are refugees *and* to those who fear them…both to those who welcome them *and* to those tasked with deciding the national policies that will determine just how many can be welcomed.

And…this is the God that may need to be proclaimed to us…to me….to you. Are there places in our common life, inside our refugee ministry, or our worship life, or our education programs, or our mission trips, or our fellowship planning where we are limited by either/or thinking rather than both/and thinking?

Are there places in our personal lives where we are thinking that things are just too different to come together…or just too similar to be of interest? Are there people we can’t accept as *both* frustratingly deaf to the needs of others *and* a beloved child of God just like us?

Well…on this Trinity Sunday, may God bend our minds and invite us into the divine vision of abundant possibility, and may we see at the heart of everything and everyone not one or the other, but the unified distinctiveness of the Trinity….

And now, standing as we’re able and turning to page 358, let’s enthusiastically proclaim our faith in the Triune, both/and God with the words of the Nicene Creed!