

Trinity Sunday, Year C
May 27, 2018
St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

I came not anticipating much.
I walked into the little church with very modest expectations.
I left later that same morning so charmed,
so utterly filled with delight,
That even now, seven years later,
when I look back on it,
I am amazed and thrilled all over again.

Now, this is a story
about St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Central City.
And yes, this is the very same St. Paul's
where next Sunday
Ann Myers-Martin will be installed as lay pastoral leader.
And I devoutly hope that a lot of us from St. James
will make the trek up there for her installation.
If you weren't planning on going before,
maybe after you hear this story
you'll change your mind.
I hope so.

Before I was ordained as a priest,
I was a deacon for six and a half years.
Throughout my diaconal ministry,
I never served a traditional parish.
Rather I served on the bishop's staff
as Diocesan Jubilee Officer.
It was my job to promote our various outreach programs.

The most wonderful thing about being Jubilee Officer was that, like the bishop, I got to travel around the diocese. I get to visit lots of parishes, to tell people about Jubilee Ministry.

Sometimes I was invited to preach. Sometimes I was invited to lead Christian ed programs. I went wherever I could wangle an invitation.

So when Sarah Freeman, the vicar at St. Paul's in Central City, asked me if I would be willing to drive up there, and talk to her congregation about Jubilee Ministry, of course I said yes.

"Don't expect much," she warned me. "If our attendance is in double digits, it's a big Sunday for us." I assured her that a small congregation was just as exciting to me as a big one. I would come whenever she wanted me.

As it turned out, she really wanted me for the Sunday she was going to be out of town. Would I be willing, she asked, to come up and lead her congregation in Morning Prayer without her? I said I would. She thanked me profusely.

So on the appointed Sunday morning, I arrived. Have any of you ever visited St. Paul's in Central City? It's a lovely little church, quite historic, built in 1874. It's charming. But it's not easy to get to.

When I got there, I discovered I was the only one there, at first.
Eventually the organist got there, and we chatted,
and she told me what hymns we'd be singing that morning.
Then a couple more people arrived, and I introduced myself.

A few minutes before 10, I excused myself
to go put on my vestments, and prepare myself.
When I came back out,
I was pleasantly surprised to see 12 people in church.
I thought wow!
Sarah told me we probably wouldn't have more than 7 or 8.
And there's 12!
I bet they came because they knew I was coming,
and they wanted to hear me preach.
Right. Oh, the lies we tell ourselves.

We began Morning Prayer,
and when we got to the first hymn,
I stepped up to lead it.
I figured with only 12 people present,
folks would need some coaxing to sing loud and strong.
As we sang, I was surprised to discover
that this congregation didn't need much coaxing.
They sang really well.
In fact, they sang great!

As the song went on, I even began singing better myself.
I love to sing harmony whenever I can,
but you guys know, I'm not a great singer.
I'm not confident that I won't hit a clunker
if I stray too far from the melody.
So when I sing alto, it's usually pretty softly
in case I mess up.
But I could hear a strong alto coming from the congregation
and that gave me confidence.

It was sort of like hearing Nina Molinaro
when she's singing in our choir.
I didn't have to find the note myself.
I just followed that alto,
and sang whatever note I heard.

When we got to the second song, the same thing happened.
The congregation sang marvelously.
It was the best-sounding congregation I'd ever heard.
I was amazed.

Third song, same thing.
The more we sang, the better we got.
It was glorious.

It was only after the service ended,
and I began greeting the folks at the back door,
that I discovered I was not the only visitor
to St. Paul's that Sunday.
In fact, there were four other visitors.
They were all singers with the Central City Opera.
They just happened to pick that Sunday
to visit St. Paul's together.

I share this story with you because
a) I want you to go to St. Paul's next Sunday,
and b) today is our Choir Appreciation Sunday,
and this seemed like an appropriate story.
And c) today also is Trinity Sunday.
It's the one Sunday of the year set aside
to ponder a teaching of the church
rather than a teaching of Jesus.

The doctrine of the Trinity
is mentioned nowhere in the Bible,
yet there are places in Scripture where it's hinted at,
if only subtly.
Places such as our reading from Isaiah this morning,
where the angels sing "holy, holy, holy is the LORD."
A trinity of holies!
What's that about?

It took the early church a long time to work out
just what those puzzling scriptural passages might mean.
The explanation they came up with is complicated.
The Nicene Creed spells it out,
but really, it's still about as clear as mud.
This whole business about Christ
being of one substance with the Father,
And the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and Son;
Three persons in one God...
How do you wrap your head around that?

People have offered different metaphors for the Trinity.
Some of you may have heard the Trinity compared to H₂O.
If it's frozen, it's ice, it's solid.
When it melts, it's liquid, it's water.
And when it boils, it's steam, a gas.
One element, three different forms.

Or maybe you've heard the Trinity compared to sunshine.
God the father is like the sun, S-U-N,
a big ball of incredible energy.
Jesus is like a sunbeam,
or a ray of light that emanates from the sun
and travels through space to strike the earth.
And the Holy Spirit is like the warmth we feel on our skin
when that sunbeam strikes us.

Or maybe you've heard the Trinity compared to an egg:
shell, eggwhite, yolk, three distinct parts to make one egg.
Or it's like braiding hair,
which requires three strands to make one braid.
Or it's like the Celtic knot
on the cover of our bulletin this morning.

But I would like to suggest to you that the Trinity
is less about form and function,
and more about interaction.
It's about relationship.
It's like a dance.
Or better still, it's like musical harmony.
Three voices, singing different notes,
but they're all singing the same song.
Blending together beautifully. Gloriously.
Like our choir!

And the only thing more glorious than three-part harmony
is four-part harmony.
That's where you and I come in.

The love of God,
the love that IS God,
is like a beautiful choir anthem,
so beautiful it will make you cry.
How remarkable it is, then, that God,
who IS this beautiful song
sung in perfect harmony,
who needs no other to be complete,
chose to create and redeem a people,
to take delight in those people,
and to invite each one of us to join in the song,
to blend our voices with God's.

No one is left out of this song.
No one is shunted off and discouraged from singing.
If we're weak or uncertain,
we can just listen for a strong note
from one of our fellow singers
and follow it.

Trinity Sunday is really not so much a time
to awkwardly try to explain
one of the most incomprehensible doctrines of the church.
Rather, it's a time to celebrate relationship,
a time for us to celebrate what we can accomplish
when we work in concert with each other
and with the Divine.

This is also about being in community with each other,
as individuals.
It's about encouraging each other,
walking with each other,
welcoming each other.

It was just a year and a half ago
that I visited St. James for the first time.
I wasn't anticipating much.
I walked into this little church with very modest expectations.

I could not have known what God had planned for me here.
I was welcomed, embraced,
eagerly invited to join in the life of the St. James community.
And it was here, among you, that I found my voice,
and began singing my part.
I was charmed, and utterly delighted.
And when I look back on it,
I am amazed and thrilled all over again.

Know this, dear people of St. James:
You are part of a beautiful song.
It's a love song that has been going on since before time.
Once you quieten yourself and begin to hear it
you just can't help but sing along.

In the name of God the tenor,
God the bass,
and God the mezzo-soprano.
Amen.