

Trinity Sunday - May 30, 2021
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Pastors like to joke about Trinity Sunday - as that Sunday in the church year where we are most likely to fall into heresy as we try to explain the incomparable mystery of the incarnation - fully human yet fully divine.

For most of us the concept of God as Trinity - remains abstract - having little practical import on our daily lives or relationship to the Divine. I think the introduction to today's Feast Day on your bulletin covers gives us a handle on how to begin thinking about the Trinity.

When we say God is the triune God, we are saying something about who God is beyond, before, and after the universe: that there is community within God. Our experience of this is reflected in Paul's words today. When we pray to God as Jesus prayed to his Abba (an everyday, intimate parental address), the Spirit prays within us, creating between us and God the same relationship Jesus has with the one who sent him. Did you hear that? When we pray to God the Spirit prays within us, creating between us and God the same relationship Jesus has with the one who sent him. The Trinity makes it possible for us to have the same intimacy with God that Jesus has. This is an astounding reality - the same grace, love and unconditional acceptance that flows between God and Jesus flows between us and God. And as we open ourselves up

to that love more and more...it transforms us and we in turn become conduits and agents of that love flowing out to others, out into the world - just as God's love flowed from Jesus - the words of the hymn "My Life flows on in Endless Song" capture this Trinitarian flow of love between God and Jesus and us and God through the Spirit

Through all of these last 15 months of pandemic, though all the tumult and the strife and the pain and the losses, the death and the suffering, the music of the Trinity, of Divine love keeps ringing...trying to get our attention ... inviting us to enter into the divine melody, to enter the song that brings beauty for ashes, healing for our wounds, and understanding where there was once only division. The music of the Trinity keeps ringing..inviting us ever deeper into the life of God, until "our faith in Christ, as one spiritual writer puts it, becomes the faith of Christ ...and we can look out at the world with his kind of eyes." ¹

I now want to share how over this last week God gave me an opportunity to see the world with his kind of eyes...

¹ Richard Rohr

It all began with the colours of the rainbow. A month or so ago, I was reflecting on how it has been 11 years since Gloria Dei became a Reconciling in Christ congregation - meaning that members of the LGBTQ+ community are welcome to be part of the congregation and that their gifts and identity are important to our church and that they are fully welcomed into all aspects of our life - including reception of the sacraments and serving in leadership roles. There is a lovely framed certificate on the wall in the narthex issued to Gloria Dei affirming the designation, “Reconciling in Christ Congregation”. But other than this and a small discolored flag high above the main entrance there were no other visible symbols of Gloria Dei’s commitment to inclusion and welcome. I was talking to Shelley about this – exploring ways we could make visible what in some ways is our best kept secret, – when Shelley suggested wrapping the large fir tree on the property along Gladwin Drive in the colors of the rainbow - a symbol to let neighbours and those who drive by on the highway know that Gloria Dei is a safe space for members of the LGBTQ and trans communities. A picture of the rainbow tree as I like to call it is in your bulletins. The tree was wrapped in the rainbow for 13 days when someone decided to rip it off. I got the news from Geoffrey and Thommy who drive by our church 4 times a day on their way to and back from their daughter Harper’s pre-school. Harper always watches out for the church

and makes sure that her parents notice it - saying there's our church - They sent me an email last Wednesday saying the rainbow on the tree was torn down.

We were hoping that perhaps the thin plastic may have been torn by a racoon, but when I came the next day, the evidence indicated that it was the work of human hands. I reached out to the neighborhood through a social media posting before and after pictures and asking if anyone had seen anything to contact me.

I wasn't expecting much of a response, and was overwhelmed by the expressions of support and solidarity that came pouring in. I want to share with you just six of the over 20 supportive comments in addition to the over 40 people from the North Shore including neighbours who left a heart emoji or like on the post.

I'm sorry. It made me happy to see it every time I passed by.

Can we do anything to help to make something else more permanent / vandalism proof?

I live up the street from there, and I saw you guys putting it up and thought that was a great addition to the neighborhood. I'm very sad to see someone has so much hate in them that they would take that down. I hope it gets put back up to show them the community won't put up with that kind of behavior.

As a LGBT person in the neighborhood I really appreciated seeing the rainbow on the tree. I'm disappointed that someone tore it down

So very sorry to hear this! I hope you put it up again until you find a more vandalism proof solution, it is such a good message to those who think Christians in general are not inclusive. These demonstrations of love and inclusiveness are so important in our world.

I was a pastor of a North Shore church some years ago. I would like to support your inclusion and the repair of your welcome rainbow or sidewalk painting. May I send a financial contribution?

What church is this? I'm looking for a more inclusive Church to attend.

That is terrible news. Very sorry to hear that your rainbow tree was vandalized! I hope that this does not dissuade you from putting it right back up!

So good of you to create this symbol of love. Sorry this happened! Just keep loving, as it seems you clearly are.

When another church put up a rainbow as a sign of inclusive welcome this is what a youth from the community said,

“it sends a message to us - no you don’t have to kill yourself, no you don’t have to be in isolation and be alone. You are loved and we welcome you, and the community is going to support you.”

Some people consider putting up a pride flag is too political for a church - but as someone pointed out:

“the rainbow has a beautiful history in the evolution of our faith. It serves as a powerful symbol of God’s grace. In [the book of] Genesis, at the end of the story of the great flood, God had a change of heart and promised never to destroy life like that again. As a sign of God’s covenant with us, the rainbow was offered. To this day, it stands at least in part to remind us that God’s grace abounds.

It is no wonder, then, that when the LGBTQIA movement was looking for a symbol to speak with power about an extravagant welcome the rainbow appeared. Not just a reminder of God’s grace, it serves also to suggest that when there is diversity there is beauty. We are not all of the same stripe and color and that is good.

Spiritual writer, Richard Rohr puts it this way:

[Love] is a universal language and underlying energy that keeps showing itself despite our best efforts to resist it. It is so simple that it is hard to teach in words, yet we all know it when we see it. After all, there is not a Native, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, or Christian way of loving. There is not a Methodist, Lutheran, or Orthodox way of running a soup kitchen. There is not a gay or straight way of being faithful, nor a Black or White way of hoping. We all know love when we see it, and we all know resistance and coldness when we feel it.”²

It seems to me that the people in the neighborhood - recognized the symbol of the rainbow as an expression of that universal love that we as people of faith believe flow from the headwaters that are God.

Pastor Lennie Duncan - a black Lutheran pastor urged pastors to call their people to become more active in the work of social justice. However, not everyone is called to be an activist marching in protests, carrying picket signs, and denouncing injustice at every opportunity, but we are all called to speak up with the truth when it matters most.³

A rainbow flag outside a church is a shorthand way of making visible the truth that we profess:

“All are welcome here.”

² Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For and Believe*

³ Joy SpearChief-Morris, “Solidarity isn’t solitary,” *Globe and Mail*, May 29, 2021

I don't know about you, but I agree with Richard Rohr,

*On my own, I don't know how to believe that I am a child or heir of God. It is being
together in our wholeness, with the entire body of Christ, that makes it somehow easier
to believe that we are beautiful.*

Thanks be to God.