

Unity, Trinity and Creativity
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If I were to ask you how many pages of churches are listed in the Tallahassee Yellowbook, what would you guess? three; five; seven. Actually, there are 10 pages, and at roughly 50 listings a page, it doesn't take a mathematician to realize there are nearly 500 different churches in the larger Tallahassee area. In my quick perusal of the Yellowbook, churches are only exceeded by insurance agents, physicians, exterminators, and, of course, lawyers.

Well, in this modern technological age, I decided to try the internet next, and when I did a simple search for churches, I received 69,410, 955 hits. Everything from the Roman Catholic to Baptist, Southern Baptist to Independent Baptist, Missionary Baptist to Grace Missionary Baptist, Open Bible to Full Gospel, Interdenominational to Non-denominational, Methodist to Episcopal to African Methodist Episcopal. And now, as you well know, we have American Anglicans. Of course, if we looked back in history each would say they had momentous, critical and godly reasons for the need to split off from the root, including our own. But of those 69 million churches on the internet, over 350,000 of them were churches for sale.

Nevertheless, I don't want to talk about division today. Instead, as we head into Thanksgiving week and many of us participate in interfaith celebrations, I want to talk about something even more important, which is unity. Yet not a unity that comes from the desire to avoid conflict; or a unity that is based on how much money we've invested in a certain church; or a unity based on who we feel most comfortable spending our time with. In other words, I want to highlight a kind of unity that is less about us, and is more about God. Unity that is born from above, if you will.

Think back for moment to the Creation Story from Genesis. We are told that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, which we may say was the work of God, the Father Almighty. But it was then the wind of God, or the Spirit of God, who swept over the face of the waters. Finally God said, "Let there be light," but not light as in the sun or the moon. That would come later on day four. No, it was light as in *enlightenment*, reason or order. And for us as Christians the New Testament tells us that Jesus is the Light that brings order to the darkness, through whom all things were made. So, the point is, it wasn't only the Father who was active in Creation. All three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, had their roles. So while the three persons of the Trinity are unique individuals, they are interdependent in their activities, meaning they need one another to accomplish their mission. And finally, we know that the persons of the Trinity stand together in equality, that they need one another and that none of the three is more important than the other.

But then the truly extraordinary part. Later in the Creation story we are told that humankind was created in the very image of God, that is, in the image of the Trinity. And so we, too, are unique individuals, yet interdependently in need of one another to accomplish our mission, and we stand together as complete equals. The trouble, however, comes when we emphasize one person of the Trinity, or one aspect of our Triune human nature, at the expense of another. You see, today, oftentimes our current society so celebrates the unique individual, that we largely ignore our interdependence upon one

another, and therefore fail in our God-given mission.

Now, I want to be very clear, that I am not trying to say that the Church must accept any movement that comes along for the sake of unity. But what I am implying is that with the power of the Holy Spirit, we Christians, perhaps above all others, should have the resources to work through any dispute. I am also not trying to say that we should reject diversity in the Church, as in Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, etc. The Trinity is diverse. But, in my experience, diversity held in balance with interdependence and equality is rarely what we have on our minds.

One of America's finest preachers is a man named Frederick Craddock, who also taught New Testament at Emory University for many years. A while back Professor Craddock was a guest lecturer at a seminary in California. But before Professor Craddock even began his lecture, a student stood up and asked, "Are you Pentecostal?" Professor Craddock responded by replying, "Do you mean am I a member of the Pentecostal Church?" "No," the student persisted, "I mean are you Pentecostal?" "Do you want to know if I speak in tongues?" Professor Craddock responded again. "No, I want to know if you're Pentecostal!" Finally, somewhat frustrated, Professor Craddock said, "I'm not sure what you're asking me," to which the student replied, "Well, you would know if you were Pentecostal!" And then he walked out of the classroom.

Now, I know this story comes from California, which we with our eastern bias sometimes refer to as "the left coast," but it seems to me we have a lot of such Christians right here in Tallahassee. You see, what this student really seemed to be asking is, "Are you a *true Christian*?" by which he meant that Professor Craddock had to believe precisely what he did, and if Professor Craddock didn't, then he had no need of him. But I would submit to you that Pentecost, the giving of the Holy Spirit, was meant to unite Christians, not to divide them. Pentecost was meant to overcome the barriers of language, culture and race, not to deepen them. Pentecost was meant to bring people together of many backgrounds for one primary purpose – to worship God. And yet, so often, we seem intent on using God's name to drive people apart.

In this morning's epistle St. Paul encourages the Ephesian Church by reminding them, "God has put all things under Christ's feet, and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is Christ's body." And later St. Paul continues, "I beg you, therefore, to lead a life worthy of the calling which you have received, with all humility and gentleness...making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

You see, we are the Body of Christ. We each have our own gifts. And none of us can say we have no need of the other. What's more, we were created in the glorious image of God, in the image of the Trinity, which means we are unique individuals, interdependently in need of one another, and deserving of equal treatment. We were created in the image of God, and that is where our self-worth ought to come from, and not by competing with one another to see who is the smartest, who is the most attractive, or even who is the most pious. We were created in the image of God, and no one can take that away from us; no amount of sin can destroy that image; nothing we do can fully extinguish that divine light in each one of us. St John said no one has ever seen God. But when we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.