

In a guidebook to the ruins of Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, England, you can find this description:

"Here the monks gathered every Sunday to hear a sermon from the Abbot -
"-except on Trinity Sunday, owing to the difficulty of the subject."

Welcome my friends to our annual, celebrative, and unbiblical, feast Mother Church regularly dedicates to what Thomas Jefferson called -- "The incomprehensible arithmetic of the Trinity."

"Unbiblical" because the word 'Trinity' is not mentioned in Holy Scripture.

"Incomprehensible" because were we able to understand the inner workings of the Almighty -- we might find ourselves hopelessly deluded by our inner demons -- or (perhaps preferably) terribly intoxicated by some of those outer ones.

And "arithmetic" because our basic summing up of God's presence in Scripture tells us of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- which we count as three, but our faith counts as one -- an illogical summing up that people of other faiths, quite reasonably, have a hard time working through.

That is why, through the years, we have taken to a vast array of mathematical gymnastics -- and descriptive aerobics to describe the indescribable.

In wrestling with this conundrum in 2006, the Presbyterians tossed around:

"Sun, Light, and Ray"

"The One from Whom, Through Whom and In Whom we offer praise."

And of course the most headline-grabbing:

"Mother, Beloved Child and Life-Giving Womb."

In seminary these never-ending discussions spilled over and out of the classroom -- to the one place where all of religion's most important questions benefit from communal focus and stretched imaginations -- the Pub.

Looking at a pint of stout, one seminarian figured Jesus as the beer, -- the Holy Spirit as the frothy head -- and God Almighty as the glass that holds it all together.

That night we examined and experimented with this particular metaphor quite closely -- until the bartender was forced to cut some of us off -- and you wondered how those generous dollars St. David's donates to 'seminary support' are really spent...

But this does not stop us from pondering the questions -- for we know instinctively that, as one Roman Catholic Nun famously put it in entitling a paper on the subject -- "God is More than Two Men and a Bird."

You and I may use the language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- old man, young man and dove -- But it's just language.

“Trinity Sunday”

Trinity, RCL-A, Sunday, May 18, 2008

We all know it can only hint at, or point toward, the ways you and I experience God.
(Katherine Jefferts Schori)

And for most of us, the ways we experience God often short-changes the Trinity.

Most of us do one of two things when we ponder the “Three-in-One:”

We ignore the Trinity -- or we practice some sort of functional Tri-theism.

Not having a clear understanding of how God can be three -- we may choose one of the three, above all others, to pray to.

We may feel more comfortable with the human side of God in Jesus.

Or the idea of an old man with a white beard on a throne, as “Father” sounds somewhat paternally comforting.

Or we may admit to so many incomprehensibilities that we go ahead and push it all on that wild and wily Holy Spirit.

As Episcopalians, Scripture, Tradition, and Reason take us to organize our Collects, or prayers, in a specific way. -- In our church we tend to pray publicly to the Father in the name of the Son and through the Holy Spirit. -- But even moreso, our prayers reflect the Trinity as a dynamic relationship that holds to a very modest framework.

For example, in this morning’s Collect we prayed to the Father, -- “who with the Son and the Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, forever and ever.”

In this, and many other formulas, we betray an understanding of God not as some static force of Gibraltar-esque magnitude -- but as something that is always moving, always morphing, amidst a web of relationships.

C.S. Lewis said this in that great little book so many of us have read, “Mere Christianity”:

God’s constant movement, “is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions -- “...in Christianity God is not a static thing -- “Not even a person -- “But a dynamic, pulsating activity -- “A life, almost a kind of drama.

“Almost, if you will not think of me irreverent, “ -- said Lewis in the 1940’s -- as “a kind of dance.”

No, Mr. Lewis, we do not think of you as irreverent -- in fact, we may think of you as prophetic.

Contemporary theologian Jay Emerson Johnson recently wrote a called “Dancing with God” as a way to put that metaphor to good use in Trinitarian conversation.

“As Christians today experiment with various ways to speak of the Trinity,” -- he writes --“the goal remains the same: “to hear the divine music as clearly as we can. -- and in hearing this tune, to join the dance.

We “Anglican Christians insist on hearing this music in a wide range of locations -- “not just in our churches or from pipe organs.

“What we do and say and hear in church expresses a particular way the divine melodies are running throughout life.

“Trinity Sunday”

Trinity, RCL-A, Sunday, May 18, 2008

We can hear it in the arts and culture -- We can hear it “in scientific inquiry and investigation -- We can hear it “in loving relationships and the creation of families -- “and in the astonishing beauty of the created world around us.” (Jay Emerson Johnson, *Dancing with God*, 2005)

If the Trinity is a dance whose music we are called to listen for -- we bend careful ears not only in church pews, -- but in office cubicles and at kitchen tables;

We listen for a tune that is calling you and me to join the dance -- And to take a bigger place in the ongoing ballroom waltz, hay-barn hoedown, and Texas Two-Step -- that is God at work in the world.

Trinity Sunday, then, is a day for you and I to take special care to listen for that music -- and to contemplate the ways in which we are called to jump in.

Just this week our parish heard this music -- it was playing a Caribbean tune.

As many of us know, our Haiti outreach mission team just returned from a week of medical missionary work -- of which I was a part.

As many of us know, Mirebalais, Haiti, sits up in the mountains north of the capital city of Port au Prince.

After landing, we take busses two and a half hours up the mountain.

The ride is a teeth-rattling, consciousness-raising exercise in modern life in a third world country.

We arrived on what one local told me, was a mild day -- 96 degrees -- with a humidity percentage to match.

The American Airlines jet deposits passengers down a jet-way ladder steeper than any U.S. flight inspector would probably ever approve at Metro.

And as we step onto a parched pavement for the walk to the terminal -- the first thing one notices is the smell.

Something's burning.

In Haiti, it seems, something is always burning.

The whole country smells like smoldering Styrofoam, Plastic bags, Palm Tree Charcoal, Tin can labels, Cardboard boxes, Shampoo bottles, Broken CD cases, Torn and tattered clothing.

It is the pungent smell of desperation and despair -- the putrid incense of a country utterly strewn with cast-offs and castaways -- looking for fuel for the charcoal oven or the roadside fire pit -- looking for a way to heat the soup or clean out the house -- by burning whatever's available.

The Third World seems overflowing with rubbish, rejects -- and with those too sick, drunk or too head-over-heals in love with their homeland to get out.

This is the place where St. David's, for 10 years now, has heard the music.

This is the place where St. David's gets up to take part in a divine dance.

“Trinity Sunday”

Trinity, RCL-A, Sunday, May 18, 2008

And through the duration of the trip, we would all grow in the realization that this is one of the many places Jesus dances.

After gathering bags and belongings, the ride through city and countryside takes us through the kinds of scenes that many of us have seen on television and newspaper.

City roads are mostly paved -- But massive speed bumps are in place to slow down kidnappers and bandits.

These obstacles can be 8-inches high and dictate the kind of “slow-down, speed-up” driving not dissimilar to Detroit’s freeway rush hour.

Country roads are much more treacherous -- For the most part, they are not paved, lit, leveled, sidewalked, patrolled, or particularly pleasant to drive upon.

They shake up your tummy -- they jostle your brain -- and coat your toothbrush with flour-like dust -- even when your toothbrush is in your shaving kit, in your suitcase, in the back seat of a closed cab.

It is after two hours on these kinds of roads -- past gas stations guarded by rifle-bearing attendants -- strategically posted, body-armored United Nations soldiers -- an array of villagers, short, tall, young, old, male, female in various stages of attire.

Many of them given to the gift of cargo carriage a la tete -- balancing everything upon one’s crown --from the week’s laundry, to the day’s groceries -- one slender, graceful young woman was spotted sacheting down the side of the road, perfectly balancing upon her oh-so-steady crown -- a single bottle of Coca-Cola.

While driving, in addition to dodging potholes the size of children’s wading pools -- we dodge speeding mopeds, bowling ball-sized rocks, and “road kill” -- a category that, we saw, even includes horses.

Finally we arrived at the place where St. David’s has, for ten years, heard the music:

- the parish house of St. Pierre Episcopal Church, and
- St. Louis Roman Catholic Church.

This is where the dance picks up.

This is where relationships are renewed, divine and terrestrial.

And we discover that for all the praying and campaigning this parish does for Haiti -- for all the talking we do about Mirebalais -- our partners at St. Pierre out-do us 100-fold.

The entire city has been talking about us.

There is such anticipation, excitement and joy among the parishioners and students at the parish and parish school -- to see this team that you all sent.

Since we went as your representatives -- Here is one of the snapshots we brought back for you:

Your rector’s Wednesday afternoon was spent in the first-ever teacher training in the brand new St. Pierre Episcopal School’s computer lab.

“Trinity Sunday”

Trinity, RCL-A, Sunday, May 18, 2008

This is where your donations helped equip a school of 850 students with a dozen laptops and a high-speed Internet connection.

Can we imagine what it's like to see a grown man sit down with a laptop and go onto the Internet for the very first time?

These teachers sat wide-eyed as the instructor walked through a simple Powerpoint presentation on how to merge onto the Information Superhighway.

Their mouths were agape -- They took meticulous notes -- The sound of mental synapses was almost audible as these teachers boiled over with ideas as to how the Internet might help their students.

“This is how American children learn,” said the instructor, “and now your children,” -- who have one pair of shoes, no access to consistent health care or even a steady food supply, -- “they can learn the very same way.”

Tutoring one young English teacher, he asked if he could find a textbook on the Internet.

I showed him how to type out, for the very first time, a-m-a-z-o-n dot c-o-m.

His eyes peeled wide open with delight -- we ordered that book, “Used,” for \$2.89, plus \$12.49 for shipping -- (sorry, honey, there's an extra charge on the credit card this month) -- and that teacher departed counting down the 45 days before that \$3 book might arrive -- and he could improve his classroom technique using synonyms and pictures -- and give his children the chance he never had to get out of poverty -- and even experience a new life of possibility and opportunity -- lives that every one of you here at St. David's helped make possible.

Meanwhile, the music was playing in big ways, all over town -- Medical folk, like Jan Ernst and Kathy Graham and Joan Elkins were busy doling out medications and cleaning teeth -- and helping thousands of patients whose needs drove them to the parish clinic.

Mirebalais is a city of 100,000 people, and it seemed like a large percentage of them showed up for a visit with our group of 47 volunteers.

Our construction teams hooked up the water to the clinic's new rest room -- that St. David's paid for with the proceeds from our Lenten Challenge.

Thanks to you, the hundreds of patients that use this clinic have a respectful and civilized place to relieve themselves -- and no longer have to use the bushes out back.

Kit Carlson, rector of All Saints', East Lansing, and I met the youth and women's group of the parish -- we toyed with the idea of hooking up a web chat with our youth groups -- now that St. Pierre has a computer lab.

These youngsters are hungry for a relationship with their American friends -- they long to meet the people behind the generosity that has been shown to them.

All the while, we tried, as best we could, to pay attention to the music as it led us to these difficult places -- broken air conditioners -- unreliable water and electricity that

“Trinity Sunday”

Trinity, RCL-A, Sunday, May 18, 2008

could, and did, go off for hours at a time -- candy-bar sized cockroaches and frisky geckos that scooted across bedroom and kitchen ceilings and walls -- 3-and-a-half hour church services, in another language -- sitting elbow to elbow with our new friends -- in un-air conditioned buildings.

We were reminded that the music this parish has heard -- the call to dance -- has little to do with personal happiness -- and everything to do with developing holiness -- you sacrificed, we sacrificed -- and now all of us bask in the gratification -- that whether we support Haiti with our prayers in the pews -- our generous donations -- or travel there in person -- it is our way of hearing the music -- and joining the dance.

The constantly moving, constantly morphing Holy Trinity that we exalt today -- reminds us that God is in relationship with God's self -- God is in relationship with the world -- in a dynamic, never-ending dance hall blur.

And as this parish heeds the words of our People's Window -- and goes out into the world -- making, maintaining and growing the relationships that help reconcile the world to its Creator -- we too understand what today's Old Testament reading reminds us -- that we are made in God's image.

And that image is an image of relationship -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit, involved in a never-ending dance.

So this morning, let us listen anew for that music.

In Word and Sacrament -- let us joyfully partake of our Eucharistic food for the journey -- and let us go forth heeding the Holy Trinity's endless invitation uttered to each one of us this day:

“Hey, Wanna Dance?”

Amen.