

The Holy Trinity C 2022  
June 12, 2022  
John 16  
(Sermon by the Reverend Michelle Manicke)

Snapshots can sometimes give us insight into the bigger picture, so today I'm going to begin with three snapshots that I hope will serve as lenses that help magnify our own understanding of how God is at work in our lives and in our world.

Snapshot #1: On Wednesday I had lunch with two clergy colleagues. It was a farewell lunch for one of them, who's currently on leave from call and is in the throes of packing up to move out of state. As we talked, the one who is on leave said, "I still feel called to parish ministry, but I'm kind of nervous about going back after an extended break. What if I forget stuff and lose my edge?..." I smiled and said to my friend, "Don't worry. The things you've learned along the way are still there, and they'll come back to you when you need them!... I know this from my own experience. Many years ago, after working with a congregation that had a lot challenges during a particularly difficult patch in my own life, I was exhausted and took an extended break. When I finally did say "yes" to a new call, I was pretty nervous. In the lead up time, I did a lot of second guessing myself, 'Do I remember how to do this?!' But once I started, everything I needed to know came back to me, and later I began to learn some new things...." My friend nodded and smiled, and I think he may have relaxed just a little. I sure hope so!

Snapshot #2: Friday evening Robert and I had dinner with some good friends, a couple who are partners both in life and in ministry. One of our friends lost both her parents within just a few weeks last fall, and she told how she's recently been able to use some of the things she learned while navigating her parents' end-of-life affairs to help an isolated, elderly member of their congregation, whose health is failing rapidly, get her affairs in order.... The next morning, as I was reflecting on this conversation and on my own experiences, I remembered once again the lesson that the things we learn along the way often help prepare us for whatever comes next.

Snapshot #3: Two thousand years ago, Jesus was sitting at the table with his closest friends after sharing a last earthly meal with them. He'd already been teaching them for a while, and as Jesus looked around the table at his friends, he realized they could only take in so much. After all, they were still reeling from the revelation that he was going away and was entrusting them to continue the work of mission and ministry without him by their side. Immersed as they were in the depths of grief, fear, and shock, the disciples couldn't even begin to fathom their Master's mysterious message about the Spirit he was promising to send them.... In that moment, Jesus knew his friends were "just done" and couldn't absorb any more, so he ended the lesson by saying, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come...." Here we see Jesus trying to reassure his friends in two ways: 1. by letting them know that it's perfectly normal – and very much okay! -- that they don't yet understand everything; and 2. by promising that the Spirit will continue to relay Jesus' teaching to them and will be there to guide them into the future, step by step, even as it's being unveiled before them.

So, what can you and I learn from these snapshots? Looking at the first two snapshots, I think each of you can probably think of similar stories from your own experience: stories of how you were able to navigate a new and challenging path by drawing on things you'd learned during previous times of trial. Hindsight is 20-20, as the saying goes! So, I can imagine that as you've looked back on those moments, wondering how on earth you ever managed to get through some of the things you did get through, you've come to see that it was God who provided you with the wisdom and courage you needed to carry on.... Just as Jesus promised, the Spirit of our Risen Lord has been there at every crossroads, guiding you, encouraging you, and teaching you everything you need to know for the next leg of your life's journey.

Speaking of life journeys makes me think of one more recent snapshot I'd like to share one with you: Last Sunday afternoon I met with seventh grader, Bella, one of Zoar's confirmation students, for a year-end wrap up session> One of the things we talked about over our pizza lunch is how the journey of faith is a lifelong journey, and it's not a linear journey from Point A to Point B. There are many ups and downs, many twists and turns, and many roadblocks and detours on this journey, but the Spirit of God is with us to help and guide us every step of the way.... As we talked, I shared with Bella a comment Dave Wichman made recently about how much he appreciates Bible study because, as he put it, "At age 82 I still enjoy learning new things!" Then I told Bella that I also like learning new things and I'm still asking questions about God and faith and life. Then I said, "Bella, I hope you'll always feel comfortable asking questions, even though there may not always be an answer you can wrap your brain around. We're all finite human beings, so we'll never understand the mystery of God, but one of the beautiful things about the church community is that we can pray and support each other. It also helps that we get to ponder the questions together and help each other figure out how to live as followers of Jesus...." I wrapped up my one-on-one conversation with Bella by saying that while we humans are here on earth, we're never done learning because God is always more than we can ever understand or imagine. Toward the end of class, Bella's mother, Sarah, joined us. I had invited her to come and share a bit about how faith has made a difference in her life. Bella listened attentively as Sarah and I each shared a personal story of how our faith has helped us get through some difficult times. Then we closed with prayer and a reminder that prayer includes listening for what God is saying to us, as well as our telling God what's on our hearts and minds. After all, God already knows our deepest thoughts and feelings!

Hmm...while I was composing that last thought about the need for prayerful listening, it occurred to me that all four of the snapshot stories I just told you include both a speaking and a listening component. That's because our life of faith is all about relationship, and relationship requires mutual communication. Mutual communication means that everyone has a place at the table, and everyone has a voice because each and every one of us is created in the image and likeness of God, who speaks all things into creation.... If you and I want to understand what it means that we're created in the image and likeness of God, we should look to Jesus because he is God's deepest self-revelation yet to humankind. Indeed, the Bible tells us that at just the right time, when human beings were ready to receive this revelation, God sent Jesus into the world to

reconcile and invite the children of God to receive the gift of abundant life through an abiding relationship with God that begins here and now and endures for all ages.<sup>1</sup>

Friends, you and I are disciples of Jesus, who commands us to follow him by loving God and loving our neighbor, for these are the two inseparable parts of the greatest Commandment. Jesus knows that following in his way won't be easy for us because great love is almost always bound up with great suffering. I'm sure many of us here today have experienced this in our own relationships with family and close friends.... And as we follow Jesus out into the wider community, our Lord's love commandment becomes even more challenging because in every age the rich and powerful of this world scoff at the power of divine love, while reveling in their love of human power. Even today you and I don't have to look very far to see that the powerful rulers and institutions of this world still resist all who follow in the reconciling way of Jesus. Yet God is not mocked by any of the ways political and religious authorities try to manipulate God's holy name for their own self-centered purposes, and, as we see throughout the gospels, Jesus himself is acutely aware of all the political machinations and the pain inflicted by his opponents, even as he trusts these things will ultimately fail.... Indeed, Jesus knows that great love and great suffering often go hand in hand on the road of faith, and he knows it won't be easy for his friends. That's why he promises that the Holy Spirit will be with us to teach us everything we need to know and to guide us every step of the way – through all that is to come.

So, on this Holy Trinity Sunday, I want to conclude by saying that the heart of our faith isn't some pie-in-the-sky, inscrutable doctrine about the nature of God being one in three and three in one. The heart of our faith is a very down-to-earth relationship, revealed through Jesus Christ, who came down to earth to reveal God's love for the whole world. This nature of the relationship into which God invites us is further revealed in the loving, dynamic relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three persons of God, who are always and everywhere working together to break down barriers and bridge all gaps, in order to invite all God's children to join the joyful and transformational dance of Trinity, which begins here and now and has no end.

Today the Spirit is calling you and me to join the dance. All we have to do is follow Jesus' lead and allow ourselves to be transformed more and more by the love poured out on us through the Holy Spirit! So, what do you say, friends? Are you ready to join the dance? If so, I invite you to join me in saying, "Yes, and I ask God to help and guide me." ["Yes, and I ask God to help and guide me."]

Thanks be to God, who is always present with us and for us, helping us continue the ongoing work of the Spirit and embracing us with an amazing grace we can never, ever fully comprehend, but which comprehends us!<sup>2</sup> Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Hebrews 1:1, for example, we read: Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

<sup>2</sup> Karoline Lewis, "Sermon Brainwave" #848: Holy Trinity Sunday C – June 12, 2022, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), 7 April 2022.