

Trinity United Methodist Church

June 7, 2020—Trinity Sunday

“Change”

Pastor Dan Elmore

Welcome

Welcome, all of you, to Trinity United Methodist Church. I want to say something to the folks at home: Just because we're reopening, slowly, to in-person worship, do not feel like you *have* to come to join us in in-person worship. If you feel not quite ready to venture out that way yet, we completely understand. We miss you, but we completely understand, and we want you to do what you feel that you need to do.

To those of you who are with us and who will venture out and join us, a few reminders: We want to make sure that we are wearing our face masks at all times. That includes even when we might step away from the group. Yes, they are uncomfortable. Yes, they are not what we are used to. But it's important for us to do so. Also, make sure that we maintain our social distancing from those who are outside of our families and our households.

Along with the social distancing, unfortunately, this means no touching, which is going to be really, really, really hard for us to do as we return to in-person worship. We're a church. We like to hug on people. We like to shake hands and so forth. It's important, though, that we follow these directions, and especially given by our Bishop.

Also, we are not passing an offering plate during these times of worship. Thank you to all of you who have been faithful in your giving, especially online and those of you dropping it off through the mail slot in the church door. Because of your faithfulness, we are able to continue in faithful ministry here at Trinity Church. If you do attend in-person worship and have an offering with you, you will be able to drop it in the offering plate as you leave.

We entered through the back parking lot door, but our directions are to have a different exit, so we're going to ask that we all exit by the front door and through the doors that will exit out onto Cedar Street. Then you're welcome to stay socially distant, but certainly greet each other if you would like to—*socially distant, again*—as we make our way back to our cars in the parking lot.

That being said—that's a lot to say—welcome to worship. That's why we're here. That's what we're eager to do as a church family. I have genuinely missed being with you all. So I'm excited that we're able to move forward in this direction.

I invite you to join in our **responsive greeting**:

Leader: O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

Congregation: Speak to us, we are listening,

L: Reveal to us, we are watching,

C: Teach us, our hearts are open,

L: Do it again, God!

C: Rush into this place, re-create us, redeem us, In your name, our Three-in-One and One-in-Three God. Amen!

Recognition of Graduates/Prayer

We're talking about *Change* today. It is Trinity Sunday in the life of the church, the traditional Sunday that we celebrate the Sunday after Pentecost. But I'm also tying in *Change*, and one of the big changes that happens at this time of year, every year, is we have a little thing called "graduation." And there have been big changes in the way graduation happens, and there's a change in the way that we celebrate our seniors. But we wanted to recognize our seniors. We're celebrating all our seniors together today. Take a look. (2020 Graduates Video)

We have much to be proud of in our youth and seniors here at Trinity. So we want to pray for them and also have a time of prayer. Also, during that time of prayer, I will offer a time when you can lift your petitions by name or otherwise. So let us pray together.

God, we are so thankful for the young people that you have placed in our lives. For sons and daughters, brothers and sisters and friends of us here at Trinity. One of the things that we miss most about not being able to worship together is that we are, indeed, a church family, and when we can't see each other, we certainly miss each other.

And so, Lord, we give thanks and praise for all these wonderful seniors, from trade school and grade school and college and otherwise. We give thanks for their hard work, their dedication and for their achievements that are so well earned. We pray, oh God, for your richest blessing upon them and their families as they move into what is next for them in their lives. And Lord, as we think about the changes that having a graduating senior bring in our lives, there are so many that are wonderful and positive changes.

And there are some changes that we experience as loss, as those who have lived at home for so many years go away to college or move out and find jobs of their own and begin lives of their own. Lord, life is all about change, and we are certainly in the midst of so many changes that have been thrust upon us here in these times in our lives. Especially during times when it is easy to despair and certainly during times when we should be questioning so much and it's hard to find answers to all of our many questions, help us to trust ultimately in you. For you have the whole world in your hands, as the song reminds us, and you know every hair on our heads. And even though we might have our plans for the future, Lord, your word tells us that when we trust in you, you alone direct our steps. And so help us to trust, God.

Also, as we come during this time of worship, we come with many concerns that are heavy on our hearts and minds, and joys as well. We pray for those who are affected by this virus. Those who have gotten sick, those who have felt the economic impacts, those who struggle in other many and varied ways. We pray for those in our congregation and lives who are ill otherwise, be it cancer or heart conditions or anything else. We are especially mindful of them and pray that this virus doesn't affect them. We give you thanks for the healing that you continue to bring in people's lives.

And especially, God, we pray just that for our country. For healing. We pray, Lord, for healing of the long-term issues that we have wrestled with in this country around matters of race, of racism, and all the many other -isms that continually seek to divide us one from the other. Especially, we pray for brothers and sisters of color who find themselves in varying degrees of pain because of recent events in our country. Help us to be slow to speak and quick to listen as we work together for solutions as one great family, all created in your image.

And so, Lord, it is such a blessing to gather with believers together in a physical space, as well as continually online. So at this time hear us as we lift to you those things that we carry in our hearts and minds, as we lift them to you aloud or in the silence of our hearts at this time. Hear us as we pray these things and more, especially as we pray in the name of Christ, who taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Sermon

Would you pray with me? Open our ears and our hearts, oh Lord. Let us hear what we need to hear and show us what we need to do to become more faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

Many of us have heard the old Mark Twain quote, where he says that "the only person who likes change is a wet baby." Change is all around us, isn't it? I don't have to dive, really, any further than that. All you have to do is turn on the news and we can see that change is, indeed, all around us. Change was thrust upon us way back in the second week of March. Do you remember March? That was like five years ago, wasn't it? At least it feels that way. Change was thrust upon us with the stay-at-home orders, including to stay at home from church. And I don't know about you, but I went through a real period where I was just *mad* at the world for canceling everything I was looking forward to. Not just church, but baseball, and concerts, and going to these things with friends and neighbors and so forth.

Now we have the change of being able to ease some of those orders. And that comes with opportunity. Now, many of us might expect that we're just going to be able to return to normal, to what *was*, right away. That we'll be able to return to things as they were right away. But if you've been out to eat lately, you know that we have to sit outside, the wait might be longer as we now wait for tables inside at 50% capacity. We certainly know as we're returning to in-person worship, this is certainly not normal for us.

So change is still afoot. And we're still, remember, in the midst of a global pandemic. It's been off the focus of the media for the last week or so, understandably so. But we're still in the midst of a global pandemic. And now we're essentially locked in a conflict for the soul of our nation.

It's easy to think that this is somehow something new. But really, we've been living through times of momentous change for most of *my* lifetime, at least, and really since the dawn of the last century. There was the industrial revolution and all the

changes that it brought, and it brought quickly. We've lived through Depressions, great and small. Through two world wars and seemingly endless military conflicts *somewhere* in the world. And then, conversely, we've lived through demonstrations for peace. I think the '60s and '70s, just by definition, are synonymous with great change. And then the technological advances as we were launched into the information age in my lifetime.

We certainly go through personal changes as well, don't we? Our bodies change in ways that we cannot help, sometimes. We go through personal changes in relationships, through breakups, through marriages, through babies, through adoptions, both human and pet adoptions. We celebrate changes, as I said today, in the seniors and their families.

So that reminds us that change is not inherently bad. Yet when all is said and done, most of us don't like change, do we? Or at least the changes that we experience—not *all* the changes that we experience.

I remember when I had an iPhone and Apple came out with a new IOS operating system, and I didn't like it. I said out loud, "But I liked it the old way. Why did they have to change it?" And then I thought, "When did I become my parents?" But we don't always like all the changes we experience.

And sometimes change is downright feared. Why? Because change almost always involves loss. Loss of what was. Even if what was, wasn't all that great. We were at least comfortable with it. Loss of comfort. Loss of something or someone that we liked or loved. Loss of security.

And so we tend to focus, when we're going through change, on the loss. On the negatives. That's our human nature. It's a good thing we're not left alone to dwell in our human nature, right? But how do we get out of those ruts?

For today, we celebrate, as I said, Trinity Sunday—the time in the life of the church when we celebrate the nature of God. When we celebrate who God is—Three in One and One in Three. (Singing) *God in Three Persons / Blessed Trinity*. We celebrate God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are all kinds of ways to illustrate that experience of God. Water, for instance, is always brought up in Confirmation class, usually—that water takes mainly three forms: Solid, in ice; liquid, as water, as we drink it; and vapor, as steam; but it's always H₂O, the same molecular structure. But all of these examples that we might use to describe the Trinity come to be ruled as heresy in the life of the church, because they stop short of who God really is simultaneously. The problem with water is, it's three different states. You can't have the same molecules of ice and liquid at the same time. God can do that. God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit all at the same time, all in the same way.

You confused yet? Good. Because I've taken many seminary classes on this, and I still get confused sometimes. That's why it's a mystery. But bottom line is that we see that God in God's self, in the essence of who God is—God is *relationship*. 1 John tells us that God is love. And how do we experience love? Through relationship with others, right? And so the essence of God is relationship. God wants to be relatable. Not the distant clockmaker who created the world and set it in motion and sits back and watches. That's not the kind of God that we have. God, who wants to be known.

So this is where we have an opportunity for a volunteer. Who wants to be my volunteer in this worship experience? Caroline? You've been voluntold. This is Caroline Pope, one of our esteemed seniors here at Trinity. And so my question to y'all is: How do you know Caroline? Tom and Shannon, how do you know Caroline? What is she to you? (*Shannon answers, "Our daughter."*) Your daughter? All right. How else do we here at Trinity know Caroline? Anna? How do you know Caroline? What is she to you? (*Anna answers, "My friend."*) Your friend? All right. If Chris or Abby were here, how would they know Caroline? Best sister ever, indeed! How do we know her here at Trinity? She's one of our Trinity "kids," right? One of our Trinity youth, and soon to be "young adult," scary as that is, right? Any other ways that you can think of that we know Caroline? (*Congregant answers, "She's a wonderful volunteer."* Another congregant: *"She's a dancer."*) Any other ways? Let's give Caroline, our wonderful volunteer—another way that we know her now—a hand. Thank you.

So that's another way that we can think of the Trinity. God, who can be known by us. Sometimes we need to know God as Father, as kind of the "large and in charge" figure in our lives. Or even the loving parent, who picks us up and fixes our boo-boos. Sometimes we need to relate to God as a brother, as a fellow human, fully divine, fully human, who experienced all the same temptations we face. Who experienced all the limitations of the human body that we experience, and yet remained sinless for our sake. Sometimes we need to relate to God as Spirit, as mysterious, as the One who speaks up for us, as our Advocate. Who comforts us, who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words when we don't know what to pray. And that's how we can know this God.

In the midst of all the change, though, that we face in life, what's our constant? Who is the only one who never changes, upon whom we can depend? God, who always has been, always is, and always will be, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And not just to relate to us individually. But in today's scripture reading, Jesus invokes the name of the Trinity through something that we know today as the Great Commission. This relationship is not meant for us to keep to ourselves. But this relationship is meant to be extended to others in ways in which they can know God as well as we know God. So it's important that we know Him well, as well.

I'm reminded of one of my favorite movie scenes ever in Elf, when Buddy has fallen in love with his elf friend, and he busts into his father's boardroom in the midst of the most important board meeting ever. He throws out his arms and he says, "I'm in love! I'm in love, and I don't care who knows it!" Right? We're in love. We have this God we can relate to, who is awesome in power but knows every hair on our heads. We have this awesome God who loves us unconditionally, who we can love back, and we *do* care who knows it, because we want *everyone* to know it.

Friends, this is what gives us hope. I love The Message translation of Romans chapter 8, where Paul writes: "This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!"

That's why I'm dressed a bit down today, because this T-shirt is one of my favorites for a bunch of reasons. I love how Eugene Peterson puts it in The Message: "What's next, Papa?" But also, as we navigate all these changes that we face, I'm reminded that this shirt belonged to one of my best friends, Tim Lyberger, who was Youth Director at my last church. Tim was a big, hulking, strapping guy, and he stretched this T-shirt out like crazy when he wore it. He was known for all of his many T-shirts. He had them on rotation in his closet, too. But Tim lived out that kind of faith, of "What's next, Papa?" He died of cancer. His wife gave me this shirt. In the midst of all of the changes that are ahead of us, whatever they are, I'm reminded that there's hope. That we have a God who has never left us nor forsaken us, who wants to know us, who wants us to know Him ever more intimately.

But not just that. One of my other favorite passages of scripture: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of the faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up." (Hebrews 12:1-3 NLT)

Friends, we've been through a lot of changes already, haven't we? And I don't know about you, but I'm pretty tired. I'm weary. I'm worn. But friends, let's have faith. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the Son. Ask God, the Father, "What's next, Papa?" And let the Spirit guide us into the glorious future that only God knows and has in store for us.

Friends, keep seeking the kingdom above all else, and everything else will fall right into place.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God, we thank you that you indeed have never left us nor forsaken us. That you are God who we can know, and know intimately. And in knowing you, we are called to share our relationship with you, your love for us, and our love for you with all those whom we encounter. It'll take different shapes and forms, especially in this turbulent time in which we live. But Lord, help us to hear your voice and help us to follow faithfully. For these things and more we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.