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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
June 19, 2011  
Psalm 8; Matthew 28:16-20; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13  
“Blessing”

We are no doubt fully aware at this point in the worship service that today is Trinity Sunday.

On this day we lift up the fact that Christians are Trinitarians. We affirm that God is fully expressed in three personalities or three dimensions: God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We are not Unitarians. For us, God is One and God is Three. God is a triangle with three sides. God is a three-leaf clover.

Ask me to comprehend this and I might quote John Wesley who says “Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God.” One must have a sense of humor to appreciate this. Basically, it’s a pretty difficult concept to comprehend and yet we believe that God is best comprehended in the trinity.

God is God in God’s essence and God became human in the person of Jesus and God continues to enliven and humanize us in and through the Holy Spirit. This makes us tick as Christians. The Holy Spirit helps us to live in Christ and through Christ connects us to God. It’s a network of being wonderfully Christian.

One of the most beautiful expressions of the trinity is given by Paul in the final words of his letter to the Corinthian church. It’s a blessing and it’s said most often at the end of worship services: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

Like the Lord’s Prayer this blessing is said so often that it sometimes washes over us without our reflecting on what it means.

The washing is not that bad though. It feels great even without much reflection. To be in worship together and to hear “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever” is enough to lift us and carry us through the day or week.

We trust the efficacy of these words. It is interesting though that Paul attaches certain adjectives to each personality. Grace goes with Jesus, love with God and communion with the Holy Spirit. It’s brilliant. He chooses his words well.

At the Tuesday Bible Study this week we discussed the biblical notion that we are to be imitators of Jesus. How do we imitate the one who prayed for his persecutors from the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing." That's grace.

Jesus called God father because of his patriarchal world. However, continuing the father theme since today is Father's Day, we are reminded of the father of the prodigal son. He could have been extremely angry and upset with his son's wasteful and reckless behavior. He was more concerned about his son's safety and well being. That's love. The son would deal with the consequences of losing his inheritance later.

Every Sunday we gather in the Fellowship Hall for communion with each other. Once a month we celebrate Holy Communion in worship. The homeless gather at the St. Vincent's dining hall in San Rafael regularly for a meal. After the bombing of Baghdad and the escalation of the Iraqi conflict San Francisco and Marin clergy of every religion walked in their religious garb to the center of the Golden Gate Bridge from either side and gathered in the middle of the bridge for a prayer for peace in Iraq and the world. These and many more like gatherings are expressions of the "communion of the Holy Spirit."

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit..." infuses the hearer with holiness, divine will, hope and approval. Every part of the blessing is given to each of us when we leave this place.

Fiorello LaGuardia, mayor of New York City during the latter years of the Great Depression and during World War II, a life-long and practicing Episcopalian, must have integrated this blessing because one night he manifested its every aspect.

Devoted New Yorkers called him "the Little Flower" because he was only five foot four and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character who used to ride in the New York City fire trucks, raid speakeasies with the police department and take entire orphanages to baseball games.

One cold night in January 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward in the city. La Guardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself.

Within a few minutes, a tattered elderly woman was brought before him charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told La Guardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a bad neighborhood, your Honor," the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson."

La Guardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you... The law makes no exceptions – ten dollars or ten days in jail." But even as he pronounced the sentence, the mayor was reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous sombrero, saying, "Here's the ten-dollar fine which I now remit; and

furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day the New York City newspapers reported that forty-seven dollars and fifty cents was turned over to a bewildered elderly woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren, fifty cents of that amount being contributed by the red-faced grocery store owner, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

It's not too difficult to see the grace of Jesus Christ and the love of God in this story and the communion of the Holy Spirit expressed in a creative act of compassion. That night, the courtroom was flooded with the apostle Paul's blessing.

How do we take the blessing into our every day lives?

It ain't easy. I get in my car and someone cuts me off or I accidentally cut someone off and she or he flips me the bird and grace, love and communion fly out of the window. After church recently, a man in Hummer with a Texas license plate parked in a "compact" parking space next to me in the Corte Madera Town Center parking lot and opened his door and banged the side of my car. I was sitting in my car and asked him nicely to be more careful. He shrugged me off. I jumped out my car and saw a scratch and yelled after him. He came back somewhat penitent and we made peace. I could have showed more grace, love and communion. I'm glad I wasn't shot.

Second, how can I be an expression of Jesus Christ's grace, God's love and the Holy Spirit's communion as a father (since this is Father's Day)? I will picnic with my family at the Presidio after this service but how are grace, love and communion enacted throughout the year? Here's the challenge: Grace places no conditions on love. It's freely given. God's love is unconditional. Communion is being in holy communion with your children at all times.

Third, how do we measure as a church? Last Sunday the statement on the Holy Spirit from our *Book of Confessions* challenged us to pray without ceasing, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced and to work with others for justice, freedom and peace. We follow Jesus and according to the statement Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, preaching good news to the poor and release to captives, blessing children and healing the sick and brokenhearted, and eating with outcasts and forgiving sinners. It's a tall order. We are called to do likewise.

There we have it. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." It's a blessing! Amen.