

# *Sermon: Trinity Sunday / PRIDE*

The Rev. Mike Wernick

June 16, 2019

Year C  
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31  
Psalm 8  
Romans 5:1-5  
John 16:12-15

I like magicians... I think the first magician I ever heard about was Harry Houdini... doing the seemingly impossible... his Water Torture Cell... him lowered upside down in a tank of water... manacled... his feet in a stock... locks and chains all over the place... and yet within two minutes... he emerged from behind the curtain... every time he did it...

More recently... there are magicians like David Blaine... Shin Lim... some of you may remember the late Doug Henning... I even got to see David Copperfield once... in person...

But what I like about magicians... is how they blur the line between reality and illusion... between what we believe to be impossible... and what we see with our own eyes... sometimes the illusion is so real... I wonder if they've broken some law of physics... if they've learned how to access some other dimension... which no one else has discovered... especially when people or animals emerge from containers which our minds tell us are too small to contain them...

I like magicians... because they point to mystery... I see what I see... but I can't believe what I'm seeing... there is a childlike sense of wonder... trusting in my experience... without being able to understand how what I see is even possible... I tell myself there must be some trick to the trick... there must be some devious kind of deception... because I've been raised by the culture which contains me... to trust what I see... except that I can't... and in that moment when the impossible is made real... in that moment when what can't be... is... there is a thrill... not in the mind... but in the heart...

and I like that feeling I get... it challenges my quiet assumption that I know how everything works... it makes me question whether I can even rely on previous experiences... to dictate or predict future ones...

*"I still have many things to say to you... but you cannot bear them now."* The disciples witnessed incredible miracles which demonstrated Jesus' true identity... Jesus told them who he was... and what would happen to him... and this not only went against the world's definition of success... but against the world's understanding of death... they could not get their heads around it... they had no point of reference for it...

It would be like having a magic trick explained... having the magician trust you enough to share her most closely guarded secrets with you... but still... you're unable to imagine or conceive... how it could possibly work... you just could not bear the explanation... your mind could make no sense of it... it would be like an alternate reality...

The Rev. Evan Garner... of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, AR... shares a pivotal insight... Jesus reassures the disciples that the Spirit will guide them into that truth... again... John uses a specific word for the Spirit's action... implying that the Spirit will not merely teach (διδάσκω) the disciples... will not only give some didactic information or intellectual understanding... will not simply describe how to get somewhere... *go two miles and turn right at the red barn*... but will lead or guide (ὁδηγέω) them... will accompany them... will be with them as they undergo new experiences... new possibilities... the Spirit shows Jesus' followers... what Jesus alone cannot effectively say to them in advance...

So it's one thing to be told about the Grand Canyon... it's another to experience a guided tour of it... it's one thing to be told about forgiveness... it's another to experience it when you feel undeserving... it's one thing to be told about new life coming out of death... it's another to experience the many ways we can be reborn... the disciples

needed to be guided by the Spirit through Jesus' death... as they move from Good Friday to Easter... and wait for the resurrection... three days... for the mind to catch up with the heart...

Novelist... playwright... and activist James Baldwin... who was gay... and African American... wrote... *we can disagree and still love each other... unless... your disagreement is rooted in my oppression... and the denial of my humanity... and my right to exist...* and our reading from Romans says... *that suffering produces endurance... and endurance produces character... and character produces hope...*

I think the kind of suffering Paul refers to... must be the spiritual suffering... that one chooses... in order to grow closer to God... because I don't know what kind of hope suffering produced in Melania and her partner Chris... who were traveling home from an evening out together... on May 30... on a London bus... when they were beaten and bloodied by five teenagers... who have since been arrested... I don't know what kind of hope it produced in Alunte Davis... Paris Cameron... or Timothy Blancher... who were shot and killed Memorial Day weekend... by a Detroit man... because two of them were gay and one transgender... I don't know what kind of hope is produced... when evil has it's way...

June is PRIDE month... L... G... B... T... Q... i... PRIDE month... but gay PRIDE was not born out of a need to celebrate being gay... but out of the harassment at the Stonewall Inn... in NYC... fifty years ago this month... and born out of the right of LGBTQi people to exist without persecution...

At yesterday's PRIDE celebration... volunteers from four area Episcopal churches... gathered to affirm God's unconditional love and welcome for all people... and what I noticed more this year than ever before... were the numbers of young people... wave after wave after wave of young people... who are now... much more easily able to live on the outside how they are on the inside... but we're not quite there yet...

The Supreme Court's decision in 2015... which legalized same-gender marriage in every state... ended with these words... *They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right...* but in an article two days ago in USA Today, we are reminded that this country is far from having a cohesive set of laws on other LGBT issues... for example... some states would prosecute people for denying service to LGBT people... while other states say someone's religious convictions are more important... right here in Michigan... one law says people can't be discriminated against during the adoption process based on sexual orientation or gender identity... but another Michigan law allows state-licensed agencies to refuse service to LGBT people based on religious beliefs...

And many of these laws... and the underlying theology from which they emerge... is based strictly in dualistic thinking... which divides an issue into two polar opposites... there is no room for oft-needed nuance... no room for the *via media*... no room for mystery... in much of this... there is only black or white... either / or... right or wrong thinking...

Although Bixby Knolls writes... **the Bible is clear**... Moabites are bad... Deuteronomy 23 says they were not to be allowed to dwell among God's people... but then comes the story of Ruth the Moabite... which challenges the prejudice against Moabites... **the Bible is clear**... Jeremiah 25 says that all the people from Uz are evil... but then comes the story of Job... a man from Uz who was "the most blameless man on earth"... **the Bible is clear**... no foreigners or eunuchs allowed... but then comes the story of an African eunuch welcomed into the church... **the Bible is clear**... God's people hated Samaritans... but then Jesus tells a story that shows not all Samaritans were bad...

Our stories may begin with prejudice... discrimination... and animosity... but the Spirit guides God's people towards openness... welcome... inclusion.... acceptance... and affirmation...

Once upon a time... there were only city-gods... whose powers were constrained by that city's walls... and who needed to be appeased... then the *Shema* proclaimed that there was only One God over all creation... but this God was still... sometimes mistakenly understood as vengeful... *in my opinion... a human projection...* then that God incarnated as Jesus the Christ... who embodied love and forgiveness... and when Jesus ascended... the Advocate... the Paraclete... the Holy Tour-Guide came to teach us... by being with us... as we are formed by new experiences... which expand the myopic circle in which we live... in to boundlessness...

The Holy Trinity... the Three in One... gives us permission to reject dualism and binaries... to embrace nuance and diversity... to Be Not Afraid with uncertainty...

In a few moments... we'll recite the Athanasian Creed... don't think about it... it doesn't make any sense that the One God... reveals three *personas*... as Creator... Redeemer... and Sustainer... it is illogical and flummoxes the rational mind... and in the mind there is no room for magic... but just try to feel it in your hearts... and anticipate that moment when the mind transcends into the heart... be on guard... for that thrilling moment... when what makes no sense at all... makes perfect sense... because that moment exists out of time and space... and you will experience the Wisdom of Proverbs... and you will experience God...

Mike+