

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

June 16, 2019
Trinity Sunday

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

Orange paint. A pair of work gloves. A zebra swallowtail butterfly. What do they have in common? Not much if you take them as separate objects. They might seem like they don't belong together because they are so different in character.

Now...what if I told you that the orange paint was enclosed inside a small ball that was used to target my family in a vicious game of paintball (and of which it will never be spoken of again that I shot Dwayne in the back...even though we were on the same team). The pair of work gloves protected our hands as we flew down a zip line at 200 feet above the ground. The zebra swallowtail butterfly flew alongside us for almost an hour as we rafted down the Gauley River.

And as much as I tell you about these three things from our vacation last week, they still won't hold real significance beyond just an interesting image, unless I tell you how they made me feel, the impact they had on me, how they changed me. Because each object is part of a story...a story that holds an experience.

For instance, the orange paintballs found me crawling through the mud with my kids, heart pounding, strategizing on how to capture a flag without being hit by Hollis' bullets. At the end of the day, we showed our bruises and battle scars, and retold our victories and defeats as we laughed with one another...tired, muddy, and sweaty. I looked at their faces and I was happy.

The pair of work gloves protected our hands as we flew down miles of zip line, high above the treetops. Dwayne was terrified of heights but didn't want to admit it. Camden was a little too thrilled in my mind to hang from this wire connecting one mountain side to the next. He would yell in delight as he sped above the trees. Those gloves offered all of us a new perspective of the world and of ourselves. As I saw their courage, I was in awe.

The butterfly was a quiet gift that comforted us all as we faced our fears through rapids that seemed impassible. It was a reminder of possibility and each time we came out of a rapid, I would look around and the butterfly would be there still lingering. And then I would look over at Leslie and she would be grinning from ear to ear in pure joy. As I saw her sense of accomplishment, I was grateful.

Paint. Gloves. A Butterfly. Separate objects but once you experience them together you know that they are indicators of something much greater. For me, they are now part of my family's experience. Of a bond that we now share. We faced our fears while we relied on each other and I think we all became a little stronger from it all. No definitions for our week together could suffice. It had to be felt.

So...to the obvious question...what does our vacation have to do with the Trinity? It is after all Trinity Sunday, the day on our liturgical calendar where we are encouraged to delve into the mystery of God the Three in One. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Well, I actually think our vacation has a lot to do with the Trinity. Because this past week, I was reminded that definitions will always fall short of experience, that knowing something isn't confined to words and explanations but is illuminated by our time, our attention, and our willingness to be changed. And so it is with the Trinity.

Let me propose it to you like this...the Trinity is simply a way for us to understand the character of God. It's an experience, not a theology. An encounter, not a doctrine. It's when we stand in awe at the indescribable and linger in the creative presence of the divine. It's God reaching out to us in a multitude of ways so that God is known and we are changed.

Of course, I could give you the basic definitions...Harper's Bible Dictionary defines the Trinity as a "term denoting the specifically Christian doctrine that God is a unity of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The word itself does not occur in the Bible. It is generally acknowledged that the church father Tertullian (145-220 CE) either coined the term or was the first to use it with reference to God." More specifically, we might define the Trinity as: God the Father – master creator; the Son – Jesus, savior and redeemer; the Holy Spirit – the agency of God's power and presence with individuals and communities.

Definitions. Inspiring, right? If that's all we had, these definitions, we would lose interest rather quickly with a "so what" attitude towards this strange concept that makes little sense as standalone words or phrases. But if we expanded those definitions to think of God as always striving to love creation, as always reaching to us at all times and in all places so that we may understand and experience God in whatever way we can, then the idea of a triune God starts to make a little more sense. God's love is so great that he didn't just create (that's the Father); he didn't just redeem and teach (that's the Son), but he also continually moves through humanity encouraging us, strengthening us, healing and renewing us (that's the Holy Spirit).

The Trinity is an invitation, not an explanation. It's an invitation to experience God.

If you read our texts for today closely, you will see all kinds of ways to experience God. Proverbs 8 and Psalm 8 encourage us to stand in awe at creation, to see this Creator God, the Father, with wonder and amazement, "rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race." What better way to experience God the Father than to look around, to be in this world and be moved by the beauty that surrounds you?

Romans 5 reminds us that Jesus came to be with us so that we might live in peace, that no matter what we may face in this life that Jesus has provided an example of endurance, character, and hope. Through Jesus we are given the example of how to live. It's God the Son that not only provides redemption for you and me but who guides us on how to share that gift

with others. What better way to experience God the Son than to serve one another, to encourage and lift up our families and our communities?

John 16 comforts us and reminds us that we will never be alone. That's the Holy Spirit – God's ever present love poured out into our lives to guide us and grow us. It's God's nurturing embrace, his proactive presence, his unifying grace. We are simply invited to keep learning, to keep opening our hearts and minds to God's ongoing desire to be in our lives. What better way to experience the Holy Spirit than to allow ourselves to grow and be moved by God's love for us?

So when we come to the Holy Trinity I would like to suggest a new starting point. Not an explanation but an invitation. An invitation to encounter God. To move beyond definitions. To say yes to an opportunity. To abide in the Holy. God is bigger than we ever imagined and God is closer than we could ever hope. That is the power of the Trinity. Amen.