

A Fidget Spinner Faith
Trinity Sunday, 2019
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I want to begin this time together by putting on the table for all of us to see two of the fears we have brought into this period of time. There may be more but I know of at least these two for sure. These fears are brought into every counseling session I conduct, every period of spiritual direction I am a part of, every worship service I participate in, every class I teach.

Most of the time these fears are so deeply buried and we are so defended against them that we are not even aware of them. Sometimes, like today when we have brought out the heavy equipment like a brass ensemble to make our music even more glorious than it usually is and have the pomp and circumstance of a Gospel procession and give the liturgy a special title like “Trinity Sunday,” the fears are very close to the surface.

The first fear, of course, is that nothing will happen. We have planned and plotted, worked hard to make this service special. I only get to preach here once in a Blue Moon and I want this sermon and service to be useful to and for you. But, what if nothing comes of it? We light the fuse to the big firecracker and it just fizzles out? What if you leave with a “ho-

hum” or “what was that about?” Nothing happens. That is one fear.

The second fear is a bigger one and it is more often more deeply hidden.

What if something does happen? What if the Spirit of God lifts us up and repositions us so that we leave here challenged, and hopefully empowered, to clean up our acts, to grow up, to wake up, to live our lives in dramatically different ways? Ways we have not and could not have imagined before this service began? What if some deeply held prejudice you hold, one you may not even be aware of, gets exposed as the falsehood it is? All prejudices are falsehoods. We just don't see ours that way. What if something like that happens?

I love the story of the Pentecostal man who wandered into a church such as this one and a service such as this one. He comes in on the pulpit aisle side during the first hymn and takes it all in. He had never seen anything quite like this. The sermon begins and the man got so caught up in it that he shouts out, “Amen!”

Of course people turned and looked. They were not, we are not, used to this sort of thing. A few minutes later, he shouts out, “Hallelujah!” Again, the people turned and stared. The preacher persevered. It happened a third time, “Praise the Lord!”

The ushers were so distraught about the man's behavior. Should they call security? The head usher went down the aisle, grabbed the man by the arm and intensely whispered to him, "You'll have to keep quiet! The pastor's right in the middle of his sermon!"

The Pentecostal man said, "Keep quiet? How can I keep quiet? I've got the Holy Spirit!"

To which the usher said, "Well, you didn't get it in this church!"

The Pentecostal man made a theological error. Most of us make it. We make it deliberately to keep the fear of something happening at bay. You see, he didn't have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had him.

That's the problem with most of our theology, liturgy, prayers and religious education. We want our religion and spirituality to stay in the boxes that we have created for them so that we can open and close them at our own discretion. We want to put God in our story. Not ourselves in God's story. If that were to happen, it would just be too scary.

Some time ago a single mom brought her adolescent son with her to see me for a counseling session. They were having a conflict. What adolescent doesn't have a conflict with his or her parent? What parent of an adolescent doesn't carry more anxiety

than anyone else could know about regarding what the future holds for their child or children?

You don't have to have a Ph. D. in psychology to know that no adolescent willingly goes to see a therapist. They are usually drug kicking and screaming to such sessions.

Knowing I needed somehow to connect with this young man, I began the session by asking him a question I frequently ask at the beginning of counseling sessions: "If our time together goes well today, what will you get out of this?"

He thought for a moment and said, "I'd like to get my fidget spinner out of time-out."

Drawing on my years of experience and vast storehouse of knowledge, I responded, "What's a fidget spinner?" I had no idea.

I'm happy to report that the session went well. Both mother and son got what they wanted. Her anxiety was relieved. He got his fidget spinner back.

As they were leaving my office, he said, "I'll send you a fidget spinner." Sure enough, a week or so later there appeared a package in my mail box here and when I opened it, there was my own fidget spinner.

I thought of that incident when I saw that I was preaching on this Trinity Sunday. Because back in March I attended a conference where Richard Rohr, whom many of you know of, illustrated his understanding of the Trinity by using a fidget spinner.

For those of you who don't know, a fidget spinner looks like this. And, for those of you who don't have one, an acolyte will be at the doors of the sanctuary when you leave this service to give you one. This is to deal with those who say, "Well, I went to church but I didn't get anything out of it." Today you can get your own fidget spinner.

I'm just glad Rohr didn't use a Maserati to illustrate the Trinity!

At the conference I mentioned Rohr held up a fidget spinner and said, "I find the 'fidget spinner' a helpful illustration to understand the Trinity." When it is still, a fidget spinner clearly has three different "lobes." When it spins, however, we lose sight of these distinct parts of the spinner and see only unbroken flow. This, says Rohr, helps us to see God as more of a verb than a noun.

One of my most important spiritual teachers, James Finley, who had Thomas Merton for his spiritual director, described his understand of God to me like this:

“Suppose you went one day to see God the Father. When you got there, you would discover that there is no God the Father to see because God the Father has emptied himself entirely into God the Son. (No, I don’t like these masculine pronouns either but stick with me.) Then, if you went to see God the Son, there would be no God the Son to be seen because God the Son had emptied himself entirely into God the Spirit. And, if you went to see God the Spirit, there would be no God the Spirit to see because God the Spirit had emptied herself out entirely into God the Father.” And on and on it goes, like a water wheel, one bucket emptying itself into the next over and over and over. Creator into Redeemer, Redeemer into Life Giver, Life Giver into Creator into Redeemer into Life Giver into Creator - over and over and over.

I hope I’m not making this too clear because it is a mystery.

You may or may not be aware of this: the word Trinity is not in the Bible nor is there an explicit doctrine of the Trinity there. The early church arrived at what we call “the doctrine of the Trinity” when they applied their reasoning to their experience. In Jesus they had experienced God. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, they experienced “the Spirit.”

Sadly, the doctrine of the Trinity receded into the background for most people who call themselves Christians. The Trinity was considered some notion for theologians to debate and argue about but not really relevant to or for most church-

goers. So, the doctrine of the Trinity went MIA - missing in action, for centuries.

Were you to ask the average church goer to explain the doctrine of the Trinity or, even more importantly, to tell you the relevance of this particular doctrine for the living of their lives, my hunch is that they would be at a loss to do so. Indeed, if the church had announced that it had gotten rid of the doctrine of the Trinity, the news wouldn't make the front page and if people did read about it, they would be more surprised that the church could agree on something than disturbed over the loss of the doctrine of the Trinity.

We are having to rethink all of our theology these days because of what we are learning about the nature of the cosmos in which we live.

When I was in high school, we were taught that our earth was a minor planet that revolves around a minor star in a solar system that is part of the Milky Way. I was taught that there might be another galaxy out there somewhere. Maybe at most two.

Now, thanks to the things like the discoveries of the Hubble Telescope scientists estimate that there are at least 200 billion galaxies, maybe more, and that each of these galaxies contain about 100 billion stars. Further, all of this that we can see and

measure makes up only 6% of the cosmos. The rest of it, 94%, is made up of stuff we can't see called "dark matter."

All of this matter, and I first heard Ilia Delio say this several years ago, is expanding, creative, evolving and entangled. She said, "I don't know what words you use to describe God, but, as a start, I would suggest those."

Once we allow the entire universe to become alive for us and in us, we are living in an enchanted world. Nothing is meaningless. Nothing can be dismissed.

This infinite love that is God is within each of us and all of creation. Everything is connected to everything. The God in you is attracted to God in everyone and everything. This is what it means to be created in the image of God.

Our understanding of God, in light of what we are learning, changes from an image of some old white man with a beard sitting off out there somewhere on a throne inaccessible to us and mostly angry to an understanding of an energy that is in constant flow and entanglement with itself.

This has the potential to change everything - us, our relationship, our culture, our politics; and all for the better.

Our mothers and fathers in the faith had an intuition about all this and called it the Holy Trinity. It is indeed a mystery but,

as we are coming to understand from what the cosmologists are now telling us, a mystery is not something that is not understandable. A mystery is something that is endlessly understandable. And we are a part of it. Because we are made in the image and likeness of God. This is the sure and certain message Jesus came to give us. And, if we are open to it, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live and be the body of Christ on this earth.

What, I hope you might wonder, is the relevance of this?

We are made in the image of this God.

The Trinity is not a mathematical conundrum to believe or have faith in. Rather, it is an invitation to a new consciousness. A new consciousness about yourself, about the person sitting next to you, about the homeless person you might encounter when you leave here, about that neighbor of yours who has a political affiliation that you know in your heart no truly right minded person would embrace, it's about one of 40,000 children who die every single day of starvation on this planet, it's about - well, you get the picture. It is about everything. All that is. All who are.

If there is one thing I would like to be remembered about my teachings here in this church I love so much, it is that God is not out there. God is not some remote, removed, heart closed to us being. God is, though no words are adequate, Sacred Mystery

that is so intimately present in the world that the world - indeed, all of creation - can be regarded as an incarnate expression of God - creative, expansive, relational, safe, a loving embrace that includes everything and every one. God is present in our lives everywhere and all the time. There is no place you can look and not see God. There is no person you can see who is not an expression of this Sacred Mystery. No one.

It is so sad to me that for many people the religion of Jesus has become focused more on what one believes than how one behaves, on some life after this one rather than here-and-now, on who is included and who is not.

Jesus didn't go about seeking out sinners and condemning them. He went about seeking the suffering and healing and forgiving them. He didn't say, "Here is a set of doctrines you have to believe and if you don't, tough luck." What Jesus talked about and demonstrated was experiencing transformation and being connected to the Sacred. He didn't talk about the Kingdom of God. He talked from the Kingdom of God and invited us to come into it. We are already in it, we just have to raise our awareness about that.

The root of all difficulty in this world lies in the notion that we are separate from each other. That cannot be allowed to be true for us. Not if we are created in the image of God whose very nature is relatedness.

Some time ago a friend of mine went to the funeral of a friend of his. This was around ten years ago which makes what I'm about to share with you even more impressive. The service was held in a church in London, England. He sent me a photo of the announcement box that was by the doors leading into the church. (This is somewhat like restaurants displaying their menus by their front door so that you know what is in store for you if you enter.) This is what it said:

WARNING!

Here we practice the inclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This means you may be mixing with tax collectors, sinners, adulterers, hypocrites, Greeks, Jews, women as well as men, female and male priests, homosexuals, lesbians, the disabled, thieves and other sinners, the dying, white people, black people, Asians and people from other races, Muslims, Bishops, bigots, people of other faiths, strangers, heretics and people with no particular faith, and so forth.

In fact, anyone like those with whom Jesus himself mixed.

So beware - this is not a private club.

WELCOME TO ALL

If you ask most people in this country if they are religious, they will think you are asking if they go to church. If you were to ask Jesus if he were religious, his response would have nothing to do with attending a religious service, believing in the literalness of the Torah or having five fundamentals that are required for belief. The teachings of Jesus made it clear that real

religion is not about attending, belonging or believing, not about requirement but relationship, not about being correct but being connected.

And, that, my friends is what the Trinity is about. I'm calling it "a fidget-spinner faith."

In the words of the Pentecostal -

Amen.

Hallelujah.

Praise God.