

Holy Trinity Weekend (RCL/C): "Zero Harm Is Not Enough!"
Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15
June 11-12, 2022
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I was recently visiting a medical center and noticed this statement posted on the wall:

[This health system] is dedicated to the notion of zero harm for our workforce community.

I think we know what they're getting at, but "zero harm" makes it sound like the bar is set pretty low. It makes me think of the first part of the Hippocratic Oath that physicians take: "Do no harm." That's a fine starting point, but it's not an end goal. Beyond causing "no harm," a physician's goal is to help and heal. Besides for fostering a "zero harm" work environment, the health system certainly wants a satisfying, collaborative, successful workplace that will enhance the wellbeing of its patients and not just its employees. As a faith family, we have guidelines and required practices in place to protect our children. Our goal is much more than "zero harm." It is abundant life, Gospel joy, an ever-deepening relationship with our Savior, inspiration for a **lifetime of faith-active-in-love**.

This is a special weekend for our Holy Trinity family. Not just here in this congregation, not just within Lutheranism, but throughout the larger Church, we celebrate the Holy Trinity this weekend after Pentecost. How there can be three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in one God is an unexplainable theological mystery. St. Augustine of Hippo, one of Christianity's all-time brainiacs, tried to figure it out. The story goes that he was working himself up to a migraine headache with his thinking about the Trinity, as he walked along the shore of the Mediterranean. He saw a little boy ahead, going back and forth from the sea to a hole he'd dug in the sand, emptying pail after pail of water into the

hole. When Augustine got close enough, he asked the child, “Hey, little guy, what are you doing?” The fellow answered, “Emptying the sea into this hole.” In an adult, all-knowing, patronizing kind of way, Augustine broke the news to him: “That’s impossible.” The little boy said, “I’ll finish this before you’ll solve the mystery of the Trinity.” And then the child disappeared. He was, of course, the Christ Child.... The moral of the tale: don’t try to solve the mystery of the Trinity. Just rejoice in it! Our God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

Dancing is the metaphor theologians use for how Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other. Dancing! I picture a circle dance. The Holy Spirit has a crown of fresh flowers in Her hair, as I imagine it. My daughter was a dance major and I know dancers on stage together are in communion with each other. They intimately relate to and communicate with each other. They are individuals who form an organic whole. The many become one, without losing their individuality. We think of St. Paul who wrote how the many members become one Body.

I’ve been a member of Holy Trinity longer than I’ve belonged to any other faith family: over 25 years. Some of you can double that number of years of membership! And this weekend of the Holy Trinity we’re receiving **new** members, welcoming **more** brothers and sisters into our faith family. We **love** our congregation. We **love** to see it grow! We rejoice for the newness, the fresh perspective, the unique gifts these sisters and brothers bring to us. We pray for grace to embrace their new ideas and never to utter those deadly “7 last words”: “We’ve never done it that way before.”

In the midst of all this world’s turmoil we’re all yearning for a sense of peace. This weekend’s lovely passage from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans (5:1) begins:

...since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand....

As opposed to the people of Israel, whose corporate identity as a people was all that mattered, we Christians, and especially we Americans, see ourselves as individuals. But Christ calls us to be more concerned for our neighbor's welfare than for our own. In his letter to the Romans (12:15-16), Paul encourages, even **exhorts**, us:

Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant... do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Don't be set in your ways. Leave room for the Holy Spirit to speak, to change you, to move you to action. Don't think you have a monopoly on truth. In today's Gospel the Lord says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13a) In other words: "You're not there yet!"

If we can just be humble enough to pray, repeatedly, "Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come as the wind and cleanse, come as the fire and burn. Convert and consecrate our lives to our great good and Your great glory." Cleansing may not be painful, but burning sure is. The letter to the Romans makes mention of suffering:

...we boast in our sufferings....

Paul isn't really talking about our personal suffering, our medical or financial or psychological suffering. He's talking about the suffering we accept, the suffering we invite, on behalf of the Gospel, on behalf of our neighbor. Voluntarily accompanying our neighbor in the midst of her or her suffering costs us; it is painful to walk beside those who are in pain. We care about them; we feel their pain when we allow ourselves to get close enough to it. Voluntarily becoming a voice for the voiceless costs us; there will always be those who feel we should keep our mouths shut, because being an advocate for the

disenfranchised is never a popular choice. Voluntarily standing beside those who feel alone and cut off, because they're from a different country or have a different sexual identity or no bank account balance or a history of addiction or mental illness: **that is being Christlike**, which will always mean opening ourselves up to criticism and accepting suffering we otherwise could have avoided for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus was not a people-pleaser. He was a God-pleaser, and He calls us to be the same. Whenever I go through the Jersey Shore ER entrance I see the notice that it is a safe haven for the drop-off of newborns, no questions asked. Our Holy Trinity community is called to be a safe haven for all God's children of all ages. No questions asked. To the extent that is true, we glorify **the** Holy Trinity, whose name we bear. Being a "no harm" zone is nowhere near good enough. We need to be a life-giving sanctuary for all whom the Holy Spirit draws to us Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham