

‘Love Times Three’  
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based on Romans 5:1-5 and John 16:12-15

I’ve come to love Trinity Sunday. It’s not like Christmas where celebrate that the day Jesus was born.

It’s not like Easter where we gather to sing ‘Alleluias!’ and dress up in our very best to celebrate the resurrection.

This is the day we acknowledge the Holy Spirit as an individual person within the Trinity of God. Wouldn’t it be great if we could gather as many people for Trinity Sunday as we do for Christmas and Easter!!?

The doctrine of the Trinity isn’t an easy concept to grasp. Trinitarian theology is very complex. The idea of the trinity evokes a kind of, “huh??” It is complex, multi-faceted, and well, surreal.

Try to explain to a child why God is God, but three persons. Saint Patrick used the three-leafed clover to explain how God can be the clover, made up of three distinct leaves.

I like to think of the Holy Spirit as the energy source for God’s mercy and grace.

We gather on his sacred day and sing ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ with gusto. The Trinity is one of those things we can try and understand, but deep down at the root of our being we accept as a matter of faith.

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus tried to explain by introducing the idea of an advocate (Holy Spirit) as a Spirit of Trust...a Spirit that unites us with Jesus and with the Father.

Within this uniting of Father, Son and Spirit, is the call to follow Jesus...the Prince of Peace who taught us that loving one another was akin to loving God!

As Jesus followers we are conditioned to tend to the sick, the lame, the forgotten and oppressed. We understand that to feed and clothe and visit the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned is to be the very heart, hands and mind of Jesus.

One of the reasons I extended my trip to Portland was to not only spend time with my mother in Nebraska but to attend the graduation ceremony at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City. My friend, Betty Musau Kazadi, was the last to receive her doctoral degree from my original cohort.

Betty’s thesis was entitled: ‘Created in the Image of God: Street Children and Economic Poverty in the Democratic Republic of Congo’.

Betty grew up in the Congo...she endured the wars, the tribal conflicts, the decay of infrastructure and governmental corruption. Through it all, Betty had the church.

As a young woman Betty was determined to attend Africa University...our United Methodist university in Zimbabwe. With no ability to pre-register, Betty left the DRC and traveled...sometimes by foot, sometimes by bus, sometimes by train...and arrived at Africa University insisting they accept her as a student. They said ‘yes’.

Betty studied; did without; went hungry; delayed marriage; and accepted debt in order to get her degree.

For Betty, and many others, an education was their salvation.

Betty knew what it meant to suffer...to endure the suffering...to rise above it...and to rely on the hope that one day, she would raise her hands and say, 'to God be the glory!'

Which she did on Friday as she walked across the stage to receive her doctoral hood.

But Betty life story is not unique in the Congo...or all of Africa, for that matter.

Struggling through the suffering is a day-to-day reality. The street children she refers to in her doctoral thesis are children who wander the streets of communities throughout the Congo looking for food and basic subsistence. There is an orphanage in Betty's hometown, but only a small percentage of street children are lucky enough to live there.

The street children of Congo suffer a kind of suffering we can only imagine!

But Betty knows what the children have is the church! Feeding programs and pastoral sheltering helps ease the physical and spiritual suffering.

I wish I could say our apportionment dollars went to help ease the children's suffering, but very, very little of it does. The truth is, there is very little WE can do to ease the suffering of the hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of street children in the Congo and throughout all of Africa.

Does that mean there is no hope? No. Because the church has something no social service agency has: prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit.

I ask you all to pray that because of Betty's research, persistence, and documented thesis...there will be street children in the Democratic Republic of Congo that will benefit from Betty's work.

I also ask you to pray for *our* street children here in Rochester. We do not need to look solely to Africa in search of children who are suffering.

It will take all the love we can muster to be expressed in many different ways to address the issues that surround and complicate the lives of Rochester's street children.

If I were to ask you... 'are you better off than your parents, I imagine most of us would say, 'yes'?

I know I've heard more than once my mother saying, "Your father and I didn't want you girls to suffer the way we did."

But I wonder? What do our street children say?

What can we do to ease their suffering? To offer them hope? To be Jesus on the streets of Rochester?

Alone, I'm not sure there is much we can do to have an impact...but what if we partnered with other churches who are trying to offer hope in the same way we are?

Perhaps there is a reason we are now better friends with The Historic Parsells Church? Maybe God has a plan?!

It is not God's intention that anyone suffer. Indeed it was on behalf of the suffering in this world that Jesus died.

Today's letter to the Romans captures one of the most famous suffering statements in all of the Bible written to encourage those who struggled to believe that comfort and advocacy came in the form of a Spirit.

*"...we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint us..."*

These famous words lay out the act of suffering in such a way the consequence of suffering is to not only inspire endurance, but produce something far, far greater...hope.

...and if I were to label a person of God as the one who instills hope...it would be the Holy Spirit.

Throughout all of the Epistle letters from Saint Paul, Saint Peter, Timothy, James or John...followers of Jesus understand suffering as a way to strengthen faith and to be encouraged we are not undergoing anything that Jesus did not endure for us.

Saint Paul's advice to the Romans?: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer."

... to the Corinthians?: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

to his beloved church in Philippi: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death..."

The disciple Timothy encouraged his disciples: "For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, ..."

Peter, the Rock upon whom Christ built the church said, "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit..."

What Christians believe about suffering is summarized by Peter himself... "And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you."

You see...suffering is not a solitary thing. As Christians we unite in our love of one another so when one suffers we all suffer with them.

Perhaps that is what encouraged Betty all those years...turning the reality of suffering into a hope that today can claim, "To God Be the Glory!"

To share in the suffering is the ultimate act of love for one another...and that love is now tripled through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Do you want to understand The Trinity a little better? It means love times three.

To God be the Glory! Amen!