

A Sermon from All Saints' Episcopal Church, Briarcliff Manor, New York
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck, Rector on May 18, 2008 (Trinity Sunday, Year A)

I'm a terrible dancer. This probably comes as no shock to any of you. Especially if you saw me get mocked by John Stewart on The Daily Show after our U2charist a few years ago. That was the first and last time I've ever danced in church. It just happened to get caught on national television.

Dancing is on my mind this morning not because I'm about to bust a move but because the whole notion of the Trinity is often compared to a divine dance of love. Three distinct dancers: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whose movement is in such sync that the individuality of the dancers often gets blurred. You've seen action photographs taken with a slow shutter speed so the movement becomes a blurry trail. Sometimes this technique is used for nighttime images of city streets so you see headlights and taillights all running together. I've seen it used with pictures of baseball pitchers just as they've released the ball. And I've seen it with photographs of dancers. You can't tell where one body leaves off and the other one begins. They appear to become blended together as one.

In the image of the Trinity as three dancers, I always imagine the blurriness as the mystery of God. For despite all the theological treatises that have been written on the subject over the years, the fullness of God remains a mystery. God remains both accessible to humanity and yet beyond the ability of human language to convey. And so any images of God we use in prayer or liturgy or music are by their very nature incomplete. God may well be Father or Creator or King Eternal or even Mother. But God is also so much more than any of these individual images.

And such is the mystery of creation. This morning we heard the creation story from Genesis. The *very long* creation story from Genesis. And this too becomes like a dance set in motion by God. A dance full of energy and vitality and life. It begins with an empty and dark dance floor: "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep." And when God says, "Let there be light" suddenly the spots go on and the stage is illuminated. The curtain is drawn and we see the set – sky above and water below. The stage becomes made up of earth and seas and vegetation. And it is good. The lighting director steps in and there is sun and moon and stars. From stage left dancers appear and the theater is filled with fish and birds and every living creature. Men and women enter and engage the entire set and one another, being fruitful and multiplying, laughing and singing. And this entire moveable feast dances in concert with the Creator. A whirlwind of motion and collaboration and creativity and life. Until the final curtain is drawn and the director takes a moment to rest.

Two things mark your average Trinity Sunday sermon. They're usually very dry and full of theological language as the preacher seeks to explain the unexplainable in large words. We like to dust off our old seminary textbooks and show off the depth of our ability to grasp complex ecclesiastical theories. So we refer to the historical controversy over the *filioque* clause – which

deals with whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, as the Western Church insisted, or just the Son, as was the belief in the Eastern Church. And we throw around words like Godhead and phrases like “one substance in three persons.” All of which are important but miss the real point of such deliberations: our own relationship with the one, true, and living God.

The other thing you’ll find in Trinity Sunday sermons are props. Preachers do all sorts of things to visually demonstrate the concept of three-in-one and one-in-three. I’ve seen preachers take three wicks, light them together, pull them apart, and then put them back together. I’ve seen preachers pour three cups of water into a bowl and then separate them back into three cups. My favorite illustration, which I often use with children, is the three-leaf clover. Legend has it that St. Patrick used the clover to explain the Trinity to the King of Ireland. Though I’m not sure what he did when stumbled upon the occasional four-leaf clover.

I’m sorry to say that I didn’t bring any props this morning. But in a sense we have two of the ultimate props – Matthew and Daniel. Because they will be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And as the people of God all say “Amen,” they will suddenly find themselves on the dance floor with the Holy Trinity.

The divine dance of love that is the Trinity is the fullest expression of God and the creative energy of the divine. It’s not merely a performance to which we are invited to sit passively and observe. It is an interactive event, a dinner theater of sorts in which we are also participants. We’re in the show! But we have to engage the dance. We have to get out onto the floor; we have to cut in. God invites us into this holy dance of love. And it is into this dance that we welcome Matthew and Daniel this morning. We will receive them into the household of God and invite them to dance with God.

One of the great things about all kids is that they’re great dancers. There’s no self-consciousness. They’ve got none of that adult fear of looking foolish. And so kids will spontaneously burst into dance. At home, at McDonalds, at church. And they don’t even need music! We can learn something from this. Because there are times when we should metaphorically drop everything and just start dancing with God. I guess it doesn’t have to even be a metaphorical dance but in my case that would be best.

I may not know the difference between a waltz, the Texas two-step, and the Macarena. But it doesn’t matter. God’s not concerned about the occasional misstep. He just wants us out on the floor. God’s not worried about us stepping on his feet. He just wants us engaged. God leads, we follow. And I know I wouldn’t have it any other way.