

This Sunday, and this Memorial Day weekend issues regarding identity and likeness and being and purpose are very much our focus.

You graduates whom we will recognize today have reached a point of change and transition and opportunity in your lives. You have the chance to consider your identity, who you are as people, and what choices you will make as you move into a new phase of your lives. Some of you are about to go off into a new experience and have the chance to somewhat re-invent yourselves if you choose to do so, you will be meeting new people, making new friends, be in new surroundings and so you will be unhindered by the way you have been known to this point in your life. Others of you are returning home to await a job or a new calling, asking what is next, how best you can put your new skills and learning into practice.

This weekend's Memorial Day celebrations remind us of the ways the identity of the nation has been shaped by wars and conflicts, and by our shared responses and reactions to such events – by what both the civilian and the service population had to face and undergo. Our society has been influenced and shaped by both the needed and the unneeded responses to real or imagined threats. We continue to face the hopes and fears we have for the future which can at times seem so uncertain.

And on this Trinity Sunday we are invited to consider and immerse ourselves in the identity and likeness, the being and purpose of the God we name as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Today is a day to come to grips with exactly who God is and what it is God asks us to be and to become. As the people of God, in our living and being we bear and carry the image, the likeness and the nature, the very purpose of God in our lives, and we are called to share who we know God to be in God's world.

It is likely that those of us who are parents of one of today's graduates grew up listening to the same music I recall a story that speaks about issues of identity and likeness and will I promise you remind you of one of our favorite bands.... A lion was getting rather old and slow and having difficulty catching its prey. He decided it needed a disguise so that other animals did not know he was a lion and would not run away. So, he went into a fancy dress shop and bought a gorilla suit. He then headed for a watering hole to see if he could catch something with his new disguise. On the way, he came across two eagles sitting on a rock. One eagle said, "Hi Mr. Lion!" The other said, "Say, where did you get the gorilla suit?" The lion, rather frustrated, asked, "And how did you know I was a lion?" The eagles then started SINGING, "Ain't no way to hide your lion eyes."

In John 16 we hear Jesus talking about and describing the identity of God, God unmasked, God for real. We hear Jesus, the Son, discuss the role of the Spirit, specifically the Spirit of Truth, and the unity Jesus shares with the Father. At one point Jesus tells the disciples that the Spirit will "declare to you the things that are to come." In the original Greek the word used is, "anagellean" which means declare, preach, proclaim, announce. At the beginning of this word there is a prefix "an" which is the equivalent of our English prefix re. As in report, or renew, or rededicate, implying repetition, redoing. So what Jesus is actually saying is that the Spirit will re-declare, or re-proclaim, re-announce, re-preach what has already been declared and proclaimed. What the Spirit is to teach and preach to us and among us is not some new, esoteric, secret knowledge that could not be declared to the original disciples. It is rather the unpacking, the reconfirming, the unfolding of the Word that we see and receive in Jesus; that Word that declares Jesus to be the Son of the Father, who with the Holy Spirit, is the God we name as the Trinity.

Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's self-disclosure. The Spirit of truth is not telling us something other than what is present in Christ. The Spirit of truth is in this activity none other than the very Spirit of the Christ, the Spirit of Jesus, not some other or additional deity.

Thank God, the Spirit continues to teach us and to disclose to us the truth of Jesus, finding just the right time and place for us to receive such teaching. Our faith, our discipleship is, a journey, a pilgrimage, in which we who follow don't and can't have Jesus all figured out at the start of our journey, instead we learn more about Jesus as the journey unfolds. The amazing grace and truth of Jesus is too large and grand to be mastered in a moment. We are to be ready for fresh insights to us, though as ancient as Creation, for the work of the Spirit of Truth continues among us.

The great 20th Century theologian, Karl Barth, once wrote that all of us Christians must continually cultivate among ourselves the "spirit of the amateur." There can be no "professional Christians," said Barth. He may well have been speaking to the clergy, but all of us need to hear this warning as well. All of us must steadfastly guard against that conceit, that deceit that acts as if we have arrived in our faith, as if there is no more growing and converting for us to do, as if the work of the Spirit of truth in us has been accomplished.

Let me put it this way, whether we are a high school graduate, or a college graduate or a Graduate school graduate or not yet a graduate, or whether it is a long time since we worried over our GPA we are all in the same boat, all of us should be working on our Masters in being disciples of Jesus, even though none of us will ever graduate! We will never graduate this side of the grave because none of us will ever fully master the art of following Jesus. We're all beginners. The earliest name applied to Christians, found in the Acts of the Apostles, is "Followers of The Way." To be a Christian means to be part of "The Way," that is, on the way with Jesus, to the Father, in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit! There is that Trinity again – just when we thought we had moved on, it reaches out to grab us, inviting us into partnership and friendship and fellowship.

Partnership and friendship and fellowship – this is exactly what we do when we are dancing...

One ancient image used for the Holy Trinity is that of a dance into which we are constantly being invited, in which we have a partner to lead us into a whole new way of expression and joy. Too often Western Christianity has chosen ideas, images and words reflecting order and dignity, formality and logical progression to describe the Trinity, as if somehow we might propose a mathematical formula to sum up who God is. Dance, on the other hand, while it has some patten and framework is joyous, spontaneous, and vital. A Triune God experienced as dance is lively and life-giving, a God so joyous, dynamic, and fertile, that God's life spills over into the world and with the creatures of creation, both creating and renewing the face of the earth. The Triune God – God existing as three mutual partners – united and complete because of the coming together of the three in this Dance provides God's model for belonging.

The Dance to which we are invited by the Triune God – is with apologies to all College Basketball fans – THE BIG, THE BIGGEST DANCE! In this dance we dance not to our own beat but to God's beat. God's beat as expressed in the intensity of God's love for the world. God's beat no long dry list of dry facts but a life-altering love, a depth of devotion and caring for the world found nowhere else.

God's dance, God's model for belonging is all about self-sacrifice and love and faith, giving not getting, sharing not hoarding, serving not being served.

The Dance to which we are invited in the Triune God, is a dance that is about and expresses peace, not war; love, not hate; hope not despair; life not death; energy not emptiness; friendship not isolation. It may be a waltz or a tango or a samba or a Highland Fling or an Irish Jig or a Polka! It might even be disco as we dance seemingly without a partner but we still dance together. And of course here in our own State one way we can dance with God will look a lot like the shag!

The dance into which God invites us is one that embraces all of life, that expresses emotion and which tells a story, which inspires, as we move to the beat and the vibration of the Creator and creation. The Dance to which we are invited in the Triune God is about Community, not individualism. The Trinity provides God's model for belonging to a community, both in the community and communities of the church and in society. Dancing as "belonging" is about relating to others. Such belonging to one another, whether within a family, church or corporation, implies a relationship and the act of relating. Belonging is not about being listed in the Directory but is all about the activity of relating to other people, belonging is action!

Such an expression of Trinitarian theology and our experience with the Triune God stands in stark contrast to the inherent individualism so dominant in our current consumer culture. Trusting in the Triune God frees us to foster genuine means of belonging, partnering, dancing, communing, aware that such attitudes and not unfettered individualism represent God's plan, God's beat for the world.

When we claim, as we do claim that God is Triune we are pointing to the truth that there exists in the Godhead the perfect relationship of love, exercised through a mutual giving and receiving. It therefore follows that when we claim, as we do, that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God we are saying that we humans are likewise capable of and called to offer ourselves in love and sacrifice to others.

The community of God, the Trinity, calls us into community – let me compare and contrast community and overreaching individualism by talking about... Roller Derby. There was a story on NPR recently that told how Roller Derby, which began in the 1930's as a Depression diversion, and ever since then has had booms and busts, but it just can't be killed. In the past few years, it's resurfaced again, but this time, as an amateur participant sport — and almost exclusively for women. The number keeps growing, but there are now well over 500 women's leagues in 16 countries, in North America, Europe, Australia, Brazil, Abu Dhabi. A&E did their reality show "Roller Girls" on the revival; Drew Barrymore starred in the movie "Whip It."

The majority of the female skaters are college-educated, and many are professionals but they all have skating names such as, "Axels of Evil", Margaret Thrasher, Demolicious, Baby Ruthless, Sybil Disobedience, Eve L. Stepmother, Georgia O'Grief and Ginger Smack. Such skating names confirm that the point of Roller Derby is not peace but violence, not cooperation but competition, not dancing but destruction.

So let me attempt to bring all this together to say to you graduates, to say to your parents and loved ones, to say to all of you that the God we know as Father, Son, Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer,

Sustainer, is the God who invites us into a Dance, in which we partner with God and with each other, with all of God's creation, all of the children of God on the earth. In this Dance with God rugged individualism gives way to community; in this Dance we cannot speak of God's love in the abstract but we must live God's love in tangible ways. Within the Dance we cannot speak about how we might love our neighbors - we must love our neighbors. Our community God invites us to make and establish community with all and as many people as possible.

The idea of God as Trinity is therefore not some abstract concept to be ignored nor some indecipherable conundrum meant to trick us or confuse us. The God who is Trinity is the God who calls us onto the dance floor in faith, there to lead us and inspire us and energize us as together we express the depth of the love, joy and peace which are God's gifts to the world, as we invite new partners to join with us in the dance.

Those of you going on to college or to your next stage in life, I remind you that this is the Dance that has been taught to you by this congregation. The rhythm of God's Dance was introduced to many of you in your baptism. You signed God's Dance card the day you stood before this or some other congregation to publicly profess your faith in Jesus Christ. God's Dance goes on here and everywhere and you are always and ever partners with God. The dance of the Trinity, is the life God has for all of us to live, today and always. Here and everywhere God invites all of us to "take the floor"; to "take your partners", and to dance on till all creation is moving to the rhythm of God's love, the love which resides in The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen