

## OUR TURN TO SING

*Preached by the Rev. Thomas M. Kryder-Reid on Trinity Sunday, 19 June 2011, at Trinity Episcopal Church, Indianapolis. Scripture readings: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Benedictus es, Domine (Song of the Three Young Men, 29-34); II Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20.*

About a week and a half ago, a staff colleague forwarded me an article titled “US doesn’t make cut for happiest nations list” [Michael B. Sauter, Charles B. Stockdale, and Douglas A McIntyre, 24/7 Wall Street, via msnbc.com, 6/20/11]. My curiosity rose even if my patriotic mood dipped a bit as I read that headline. This study was conducted by an investor news service known as 24/7 Wall Street. The authors analyzed data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Better Life Index. Their goal, as the article puts it, was “to objectively determine the happiest countries in the world.”

Needless to say, Greece didn’t make the cut—nor did Ireland or Portugal, given their financial turmoil. Nor were data even available for, as the authors note, “politically unstable countries in the Middle East or large emerging economies” like China.

So, which *are* the happiest countries in the world? Who’s on the top-ten list? And why are they so happy?

Well there’s Finland, for example, number eight: education there takes highest priority. Israel, surprisingly enough, given all the conflict you hear about in the news—Israel ranks ninth: low taxes. Sweden, sixth, has air quality like the Garden of Eden and governmental transparency, too. Third-ranked Norway boasts high income and low unemployment. Second-ranked Canadians are safe, well educated, and really healthy.

Which leads us to—drum roll—number one. The people of this particular nation rate themselves happiest year after year. Yet oddly enough, they don’t laud themselves for low taxes, long life expectancy, or even fabulous physical health.

So you may wonder, what *is* so happy about life in—Denmark?

What stands out in Denmark is the value placed on *community*, a strong sense of relationship. Ninety-seven percent of Danes will tell you they have somebody other than a family member they can rely on. And they start investing in and nurturing their sense of community, of relationship, early on. Would you believe that the Danish government allows Danish working moms a full year of maternity leave? Government-subsidized!—which, you might say, is building community from the basics.

I

We’re here today to celebrate and recommit ourselves to building community from the basics.

Today is Trinity Sunday. It’s our Trinity Church namesake feast day. It’s the only day on the church calendar not thematically linked in a direct way to one of God’s mighty acts [Charles Price & Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living*, Seabury 1979, p. 232]. Rather, it celebrates God’s essential being. Trinity Sunday marvels in the mystery of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, “three in one and one in three,” as the ancient language tells and our opening hymn extols [St. Patrick’s Breastplate, *Hymnal 1982*, #370].

So if you’re wondering what that mystery can mean for us here and now, let me suggest an example like, well, Denmark.

Denmark, you may ask—comparable to God? *How?*

Don’t get me wrong—I’m not proposing that the Danes are some paragon of Christian faith and virtue, any more than any other nation nowadays can claim to be (especially in Europe). But this one parallel to our focus today on Trinity Sunday does jump out—the value placed on community. God also is all about community. God is all about community because God is Trinity.

Now we could spend hours discussing and debating the doctrine of the Trinity, just as theologians have been doing since the early centuries of the church. We could strain our brains trying to make rational sense of how one God can be God in three “persons”—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each distinct and free, yet all connected and united. And where would we end up?

My hope—my expectation—is that we’d come to appreciate all the more that God isn’t just some divine monolith. God isn’t just an island unto God’s self. Rather, God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three in one and one in three—*is* community. God’s essential being is community. God’s very nature is relationship. And God’s highest happiness is the divine love that keeps all three “persons” of God in relationship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each distinct and free, yet all connected and united. And what’s more, God’s love is such that once upon a time one of those “persons” of God—the Son—came to be one of us so that we, too, could be in such relationship with God as to know God’s highest happiness within and among ourselves.

Now I realize—all I just said is a lot to absorb. But what matters for us here and now is the implication. And the implication is this: If God’s essential being is community, if God’s very nature is relationship, if God’s highest happiness is the love that connects God within God and God with us—and if you and I and people

everywhere are created in God's image, as the Genesis creation story we heard today affirms—then our highest happiness, too, comes to life in community.

How does and how can our highest happiness as Trinity Church, Indianapolis, come to life in community?

## II

This past week, I came across another article—one that suggests how. This author talks about how community can come to life in any church. She highlights how community can come to life in the image of God the Trinity—which, you might say, really is building community from the basics.

Now let me note straightaway that the tradition this author speaks from is different from ours. She and her church have their particular ways of doing things. Still, her experience just may strike a chord for us, especially if we hear what she describes more as a metaphor than as a prescription for life among us.

She reflects on her baptism. She was in her late thirties when she was baptized. "I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," she emphasizes. She describes the liturgy as "wrapped around [those] words," as "expand[ing] our representation of God." She goes on, then, to recount the ceremony itself—the effect of the water, the support of the people.

Then came one splash for the Creator... Then came a splash for the beloved Son... [Then] the one splash for the Holy Spirit became a long pouring of water...

I had not anticipated this moment. The Spirit became overwhelming... seemingly out of control, and I was surprised to the point of hilarity: I giggled. I heard the congregation titter in response... For a moment I wondered if I would inhale [the water] accidentally. Would I drown here? A wave of fear passed through me...

Then [and here's where her tradition varies from ours] then it was my turn to sing, as was the tradition in our church. Everyone who was old enough to sing at his or her baptism sang... I began to sing. As I looked out at the faces of those who had welcomed and loved me to this moment, I knew that I was being embraced into community—not only this community, but also into a larger community of faith, one that stretched back into history and [forward] into the future.

As I sang, I looked up toward the vaulted ceiling of the church and thought of the openness and immensity of God. I was overcome... My voice began to tremble and crack as I sang...

The congregation was right there. The people began to hum when my voice grew weak. They came in under me, lifting me up and supporting me... [M]y voice broke. Again the community was there to put words to the humming...

They sang for me when I couldn't sing. They sang when I felt overwhelmed by my own smallness and the vastness of God. They sang when I felt daunted by the task of following Jesus. They sang when my sense of aloneness was broken in the midst of their communal presence. They sang while I healed, and after a while I could sing again.

[She concludes...] That is what we do for each other. That is what it means to be the body of Christ and baptized into it by the Holy Spirit of a Creator God. We sing for each other. [Nanette Sawyer, in *Christian Century* magazine, 6/14/11, p. 20]

How can we "sing for each other" here at Trinity Church? How does our *life in community* reflect the love that unites God's essential being, that is God's very nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

I can only begin to count the ways. You may want to start your own top-ten list. I'll give you a Trinitarian three for now.

Take, for starters, the example of Angie and Neil Wylde, married sixty years. In a few minutes, they'll come forward among us to ask God's continuing blessing on their sixty years of marriage, on their two-in-one communion as husband and wife, on their extended communion as family. We sing for them as we sing for each other.

Or how about the example of every loving father and father-figure we give thanks for today on Father's Day? Look around you and see the many dads among us. Remember the many who've gone before us, who rest now in God the Father's eternal embrace. We sing for them as we sing for each other.

Or how about the whole multitude of ministers and ministries which constitute this congregation we call Trinity? Think of all our differences as well as commonalities we bring together as we pursue our stated mission as a congregation—to "accept, nourish, and send all to do God's work" and do it "through worship, learning and serving." How can we most happily and lovingly fulfill our mission?

How else but as we sing for each other!

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