

While prepping this morning's sermon an long awaited article responding to a survey done by the Rev. Richard Bott (currently minister at Dunbar United Church in Kerrisdale) came out. I found myself intrigued and sidetracked as I began to delve into the article and its results along with the subsequent conversation. Richard wrote "On March 25, 2016, while watching an interview with Gretta Vosper, an ordained ministerial colleague in The United Church of Canada, on The National, I was interested to hear her say, "... it would be at least upwards of 50% of the clergy in the United Church who don't believe in a theistic, supernatural, God." *Richard continues* I have heard this, or similar, claims made by others about ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada. Although open to the possibility that the numbers were as high as suggested by Gretta Vosper's statement, conversations I had with colleagues suggested that 50% might be a high estimate.

*His* objective in doing this study was to get an initial sense of how ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada would compare their own beliefs about God to that of this statement. If given the opportunity to choose for themselves, would they say that they do or do not "believe in a theistic, supernatural, God?" *This was meant to be* a preliminary and exploratory study, to see if the beliefs of ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada could be an area for future exploration." (1415 clergy responded).

Now I know you are all intrigued to know the survey results and responses but I'm not going to give them to you right now because you might miss the point of that which intrigued me the most.

You see, today we find ourselves on Trinity Sunday. Throughout my faith life and career as a minister I have at times found myself enliven by conversations about doctrines like the Trinity and at other times they just frustrate me.

Today my thoughts resonate with Karoline Lewis when she writes "Holy Trinity Sunday is a somewhat ambiguous liturgical day. *I'm not sure what to* think about the Trinity, to be honest. And I am always rather dubious about doctrines that the church deemed necessary to assert. Not because I think they are wrong or nefarious or some sort of suspicious ecclesial stamping out or silencing of rogue voices. Not because I don't believe that God reveals God's self through Creator, Word made flesh, and Spirit. Not because there's anything inherently problematic in creedal claims of the church for the sake of its identity. But I do fear when a doctrine takes over our imagination for God or when we try too hard to fit a doctrine into a

biblical text or when we allow a rather complex affirmation about God's activity in the world to replace real life experiences of God."

The concept of the Trinity at this point in my life feels like a way to box God in. (or triangle might be a more appropriate shape). In previous years it has helped grow my faith so if you deeply engage with the trinitarian metaphor you don't need to let that go, but right now I'm not feeling real doctrinal (maybe it the rebellious side coming out in me as I work and worship in an Anglican church), but whatever it is I'm only okay with it if it is stretching us to new open possibilities. See, I have a bit of a confession - last week when Nick was preaching about the Spirit I found myself saying a lot of "yes, but" and "no, because" but then I loved it when Nick said, "I may be wrong." Phew. I thought. Now, I'm not saying he was wrong, in fact as he continued what he had to say really resonated. But, this my friends is one of the reasons Nick and I are finding ourselves enjoying our time of working together, it is one of the greatest gifts of having a ministerial colleague because we both like to ponder, discuss, question and discover not the answer but the next question. The conversations we are having without a doubt filter into our work in other areas of the church. And more importantly I hope by working together we as clergy are growing in our faith.

And that takes me back to why I'm intrigued by a survey of ministers thoughts on 'who is God' not because I want to know the answer but I love that we as ministers are being forced to continue to ponder the question. To think critically about what we really do think and what we really don't yet know. For that I thank Gretta. The Trinity for me becomes problematic when we teach it as if it answers all our questions about how to think about God. Personally I believe that an essential component of faith is ever searching, always striving to come to know more of God and how we connect to God so that we might live more fully and offer fullness of life to all of creation. When we stop learning, growing, questioning, striving in our faith.... I think we are in a dangerous place.

That is why I love the character of the Spirit, the advocate, the Paraclete. In fact if the Trinity were a Tri-cycle my Spirit tire would be strong while the Father God tire would be a little flat. (The Jesus tire is probably my front tire but that is a conversation for another day). I love the Spirit for a few reasons - one because the Spirit feels like the presence of faith here and now. I love the Spirit because I love the image of the wind of God, as a sailor it is an image I can feel, embrace, experience. It's why my first daughters name means wind. I love the Spirit because I enjoy playing with the image of lady wisdom, and I have become very comfortable with mystery in my lifetime. Although I am pretty down to earth and I don't do well when things are seemingly 'airy fairy.' I also do

not do well with black and white thinking. I have seen and experienced way to much inexplicable in my lifetime, and so I have had to embrace mystery. In fact if you try to make many stories of my faith concrete (black and white) for me, things like ‘the resurrection’ or ‘the birth story’ or most miracles I will likely either say out loud or think to myself depending on the situation - you are missing the point entirely. Our faith journey must always be about new life and growth.

That is probably why when I read the scripture passage in John for the week I found myself laughing out loud, likely it was both a nervous laugh and a resonating laugh. As Jesus warns his disciples about what it will be like to be a true follower of Christ he says “Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.” Now, fortunately in this country we as clergy are fairly safe from being killed for our beliefs but we will regularly have them challenged, and we will be criticized for the way we carry out our faith because someone else will see it differently. Very little of what we say, do or act will not be over-examined just because we are in the profession we are in. But if you think that the life of a Christian for anyone is to be a life that makes you more comfortable then you likely have missed the message of the gospel. Which is probably why Jesus said ““I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”

I wonder what those things might have been back in the day. Perhaps Jesus meant that the Spirit of truth and love was going to blow their hearts and minds wide open, over and over and over again. Perhaps the Spirit was going to call them to see every race, every gender, every religion, every being as loved by God. Perhaps Jesus knew they were not able to bear the truth that both Jews and gentiles were a part of the kingdom. Perhaps Jesus knew that one day we would be challenged to recognize that blacks were equal to whites, women were as worthy as men, a gay, transgendered or bi-sexual person was as loved by God as a straight one... and the list goes on.

I couldn’t help but read aloud “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong...”

Why did Jesus leave? Who is the Spirit to be to us? The Spirit is to be the one that reminds us of what we have been taught. What we already know to be truth because it has been written on our hearts, in our minds, because we have learned it from the life of Jesus and because we have the light of life, the truth of the Spirit within us. We were created with it.

Jesus is no longer with us because we have been left to do the work. We are left to live out in our world that which we have been taught. It is like a student who studies and learns, if they simply remain in the classroom, they will never contribute to the world what they have learned. It is like a child leaving their parents home, as adults many of us find ourselves going back to our parents later and life and confessing they are wiser than we thought they were. In fact most of us from time to time find ourselves living out habits or truths we have been taught from a young age.

When I was a youth worker I would regularly have parents coming to me shaking their heads, sighing asking me if there was any hope for their child and I would often laugh in response. There is a lot of hope, your child is wonderful, engaging, polite and a delight to be with. I would get stunned looks back and at times they would remind me whose parent they were. Yep. That's the one I'm speaking of I would say.

I had that very experience a couple weeks back. So I am a mom of a toddler. Many of you have had toddlers. But mine is different. She's three and she's bossy, and strong willed, and can throw a tantrum if my answer is 'no.' In fact a common phrase of hers when i don't respond the way she wants is "that's rude talk." LOL - whose child is this I wonder from time to time. Now I love her dearly and her sweet moments are more frequent than not but sometimes I wonder. So last week when I was picking her up from pre-school I had to laugh when the teacher says "Ami is one of the most polite children we have ever had, she is so much fun, we love having her in our class." Haha. Good to know she's normal. She lives out what she is being taught in the real world while she challenges it at home.

If Jesus had remained with the disciples they would have never picked up the work. They would have continued to foible, and depend upon him to do the loving and welcoming and healing and teaching. Instead it is up to them, it's up to us to live out the spirit of wisdom. How are we to do it? Go back to the Spirit of Wisdom and truth in proverbs and shout it from the streets.

What is the Spirit calling you to? Where is the truth you are to speak? What is the injustice you notice and how do you respond? We are called to live boldly with wisdom and truth. Oh we will get it wrong from time to time just ask Mr. Trudeau, he'll tell you we are human and we make mistakes. But the truth as I see it is we get a concept or doctrine like the Trinity right when it intersects God and our living. We are called to bear witness to the peace and love of God every day of our lives, may we so live. The Trinity makes sense when we participate in the work of the holy in our world.

Amen.