

Trinity Sunday 2018
Based on Romans 8:12-17
“Children of the Triune God”
Rev. Dr. Kevin Orr

Memorial Day weekend is the unofficial start of summer. Even though summer doesn't begin until June 21, we all are starting to transition into what I call “summer mode.” Those of us with kids in school are transitioning from the school schedule to the summer schedule. This means longer days filled with all kinds of different activities: a summer job, camps, vacations, festivals, weekend getaways.

But the transition into summer mode isn't the only transition that happens this time of year. High school graduates are transitioning into college life or vocational training. College graduates are transitioning into graduate school or into a career. June is the most popular month to get married, and marriage is one of the biggest transitions in life. In a few weeks at annual conference people will be commissioned or ordained. Churches across our conference are experiencing the transition of a change of appointment of their pastor. In many ways, this time of year is a time of transition.

With this in mind, I am inviting us all to transition from “thinking about doing” and “talking about doing” to action. The time has come for all of us to find a place in our life together and dig in. Now, I'm not saying we haven't been active already! Obviously, we all are busy people with busy lives. And we fill our days with lots of activity. Rather, what I am asking us to do is to increase our level of engagement with the church. For St. Luke's to thrive, each of us has to do our part. And I believe that there is something each one of us can do. If you believe you are already doing all you can do, God bless you. If you have been sitting back and waiting to see how things turn out, my word to you is, grab an oar and start paddling. We are all in this together.

We begin this season of transition from thinking about and talking about into action on a Sunday that is a transitional Sunday in the Christian year. We are moving into a period that is sometimes called “ordinary time.” That doesn't mean this is a time of the year that is

ordinary or plain. What it means is that liturgically we number each Sunday after Pentecost, ordinal being another word for number. This is the first Sunday after Pentecost. We keep numbering these Sundays all the way to the end of November, when we begin a new year with the start of Advent.

This transitional Sunday, from the Easter season into ordinary time is called Trinity Sunday. This is the only Sunday of the year that is dedicated to a Christian doctrine. The Trinity, of course, is central to what we believe as Christians, that God is known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one God. We don't believe in three gods. We believe in one God who is three Persons, co-equal, of the same essence, and so completely interrelated that the three act in total harmony. The doctrine of the trinity seeks to communicate how profoundly relational God is at God's very core.

Now the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that I'm not going to take time here to explain. It's too difficult to explain how it is that one plus one plus one equals one. It's a mind bender. And the attempted explanations across the centuries are more or less convincing. We claim it is true because in our tradition when we are talking about divine things we speak of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus gave his great commission, he called on his apostles to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So we know these three persons go together, but we don't worship them as three gods. We only worship one. And how to make sense of this is a real puzzle and I'm not going to try to explain it now.

Instead, I want to help us claim and celebrate that we live our life in a relationship with the Triune God. It makes all the difference that we relate to God as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit. It makes a difference as we move into this time of transition into greater commitment to live our lives with God.

I want to start by talking about the Holy Spirit, which is known by many names in our tradition. In the scripture passage read this morning, the spirit is named the spirit of adoption. As a person who was adopted, I am always attentive when the scripture speaks of adoption. Those of us who are adopted have the advantage of knowing more deeply what it

means to be adopted. The first thing I want to say about this is that adopted children are in every way the children of their adoptive parents save genetics. I was adopted as a baby. My mom and dad are the only parents I've known. They are my parents like anyone else. The only difference is that I am not biologically related to them. The second thing about adoption is the fact that I was chosen by my adoptive parents. By their own free will they chose me to be their son. They didn't have to be my parents. It was their decision to adopt me.

So keep these two points in mind when we reflect on how we have received the spirit of adoption. Our relationship with God is marked by the spirit of adoption. First, we are in every way sons and daughters of God, save genetics. By that I mean that we don't share the same essence as God. God is divine and we are not. Other than that, God is in every way our father/mother/parent and we are God's children. Isn't that amazing? I find this faith claim to be very moving and empowering. Second, it is by God's own free will that we are children of God. God made the decision to claim us as God's own children. Now I don't want to push this too hard. God is love. So how could God have freely chosen anything other than to claim us as God's children? How could God choose not to claim us? Still, I want to affirm that God was not *coerced* into choosing us. It is God's deep desire to be in relation to us as our divine parent. God wants us as God's children. That's what is so moving to me. You and I are desperately wanted by God. This is what the spirit of adoption means in our relationship with God.

But there's one other person that is included in our adoption. Along with the Spirit and the Father is the Son, Jesus. If Jesus is God's son, that means that Jesus is our brother. In fact, the only thing that makes us different from Jesus is that we don't share the same genetics. Jesus is the natural son of God. That means they share the same genetics. They are both divine. Other than that, it is entirely appropriate to think of Jesus as our brother, and to love him as a brother. I can imagine that if my parents had a natural son or daughter they would have been my brother or sister in every way but genetics. It wouldn't have made any difference if we were not biologically related to each other. We would still be family.

And that's the overall point here. You and I are a part of a global family. By God's action, you and I are brothers and sisters to each other. We all share the same brother, whose name is Jesus. And we are all children of God. We are in truth one big family. Imagine how different the world would be if we identified every person on earth as our brother or sister. It would absolutely revolutionize the world.

This is what is so awesome, and worth remembering as we continue to live out our days. We are all the adopted children of God. And because of this relationship, we share in the inheritance of our brother Jesus. Jesus has a promised inheritance as the king of kings and lord of lords. So if he is our brother, that puts us into a royal family. In fact, that's what Peter wrote in one of his letters, that you and I are royalty. A royal priesthood is how Peter identified us.

I can't help but think of Meghan Markle, who entered St. George's chapel as a commoner and came out as a princess, the duchess of Sussex. Her very identity changed, as well as the rest of her life. Kim saw a meme of Meghan looking blissfully into the eyes of Harry at the wedding and the meme said, "The look on your face when you realize you will never have to do laundry again." But really, her life has changed in such a profound way. But her life is not going to be just sitting around being waited on hand and foot. She's going to be busy, appearing everywhere, engaging in all kinds of events, fulfilling an exhausting set of responsibilities. You could say that she's going to be too busy to do her laundry if she even wanted to.

Now, obviously, when I talk about us being royalty, I'm not talking about how we need to understand ourselves to be just like Princess Meghan. It would be kind of sweet to live in a castle, ride around in a carriage and go to all those fancy parties. But, that's not the nature of our royalty. The kingdom we are part of is not anywhere close to that of the British monarchy. It is so much greater and lasting. Our kingdom is the kingdom of God, whose reign is over the entire universe. So, yeah, it's a whole different thing.

Because of who we are, as children of God, we are to follow the leading of the Spirit. That's what Paul wrote, "those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." And how does that work? It works

when we ask ourselves, “What would a child of God do?” And then we listen to what our heart tells us. Why our heart and not our head? Because the Spirit lives in our heart, not in our heads. I’m not saying our heads aren’t important. Our heads help us figure out how to respond. But it is by listening to our heart that we get a sense of what we need to do. Our hearts guide us as to what to do and our heads guide us in how to do it.

Because of who we are, as children of God, we live with gratitude to God for what God has done for us, that God has claimed us as God’s children. Paul wrote, “so then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors.” That is, we are in God’s debt. Have you heard of stories where someone saves somebody’s life? So often, when the one who was saved expresses gratitude to the person that saved them, they will say something like, “I am forever in your debt.” This person owes their very life to the person that saved them. In a similar way we owe our lives to God who saves us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who has defeated the power of death and who has given us the promise of everlasting life. We truly owe our lives to God. That’s the kind of debt that we have toward God, a debt of gratitude, devotion, and service.

Finally, because of who we are, as children of God, we endure the suffering that comes with living in this world knowing that we have a share in the glory of Jesus. Life is full of suffering of all different kinds, physical, emotional, even spiritual. Life is hard. And sometimes the suffering is nearly overwhelming. But what can keep us from being completely undone by the suffering we must endure is to remember to whom we belong. Each of us is a child of God. Each of us has a share in God’s everlasting kingdom. Each of us possesses dignity, even nobility, as princes and princesses of the king. And when we contemplate our status as sons and daughters of God, and the share we possess in the glory of Jesus our brother, we are able to rise above, to endure our suffering with dignity and grace, mindful of the suffering that Jesus endured, and the suffering that God endures as God experiences the suffering with us. We do not ever suffer alone. With this hope, we can endure. We can break out of that which seeks to bind us and sap the life out of us: the bondage of grief, the bondage of loss, the bondage of fear,

the bondage of no longer caring. We can always remember who we are, breathe in deeply the spirit of life, remember that Jesus said he will never leave us or forsake us, and continue moving forward under the loving care of our divine parent.

The decision is yours. There is so much that needs doing, not only in our life together as a church but the vast, immeasurable need all around us in our community. Are you weary? Place your burdens in the strong hands of our Father/Mother God. Are you uninspired? Imagine Jesus walking by your side, the same one who died on the cross for your sake and who rose from the dead. Be inspired by his way of life, the things he did, the things he taught. Are you lost and not sure what to do? Listen to your heart, where the Holy Spirit lives. Let your heart guide you to where you need to be and what you need to do. But most of all, remember who you are. Live your life as a child of God who is known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.