**Genesis 1:1---2:4**

**2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

I can't help but tell this story from my own life about Trinity Sunday.

This happened during a homiletics class in seminary – *homiletics ­*being the study of sermon writing. The instructor had convened a panel discussion for our class that day consisting of some esteemed preachers and scholars including our very own Dean of the seminary, himself a scholar in the field of homiletics.

They were talking about the various hardships one faces in writing sermons, like finding meaning in those church holy days that are either loaded with emotion – like Christmas – or so obscure that they don't register at all – like today: Trinity Sunday.

Chances are good that you haven't hung a Trinity Sunday wreath on your door. Your kids probably don't have happy memories of special food on Trinity Sunday. And, sad to say: The Holy Trinity Egg Hunt has been cancelled for lack of interest.

So this very dignified panel of speakers was talking about such things and I raised my hand. I wanted to ask about a sermon illustration – a prop, really – that I had seen used in my own home parish: a can of "Three-In-One" oil.

………….upon which, the Dean himself, slowly, solemnly rose to his feet – all the panelists heretofore had been seated – with finger pointing to heaven and said: "Whatever you do in your preaching careers, do not hold up a can of Three-In-One oil and say this is like the Holy Trinity."

And then he sat down.

………the theological implications of which never registered with me, being too horrified for being the cause of bringing the Dean to his feet. Therefore, I am pleased to report that today's sermon will not liken our Lord to that household staple with the triple ability to "clean, lubricate and protect" – although there just may be a good message somewhere in that analogy. The God who cleans, lubricates and protects. But I will not go there.

There will be no sermon prop of any kind for today's message, with all due apologies to St. Patrick of Ireland. He is said to have used a shamrock to represent the Trinity. We sang a song in his honor as our opening hymn. Instead of props and clever sermon illustrations, for greater appreciation of the Trinity we need really only one thing: our imaginations.

Quite frankly, I believe the imagination is terribly underused in our spiritual lives. We tend to focus on rules and rigidity; on getting it right. We fuss about moral measurements and whether we’re up to snuff. Actually, we often spend more time wondering whether everyone else is up to snuff!

In whatever part of our lives where we are fully in control and fully competent, God is not welcome. We don’t need something outside ourselves when we’re doing just fine on our own. But when we can move our spiritual life and practices away from what is well-trod territory, we begin to meet God for the first time, again. For most of us, this is the territory of the imagination. We just don’t go there with the Divine Life often enough.

And imaginative it is that we Christians believe in the Trinity, a doctrine that took about three hundred years to hammer out. It says that there is one Father, not three………..one Son, not three, and one Spirit, not three. And further that the Father is not the Son or the Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Spirit; and the Spirit is not the other two either.

While that seems like an awful lot of doctrinaire wrangling worthy of a contortionist, do cut our religious forebears some slack. They were desperately trying to defend historic monotheism while asserting the divinity of Christ and establishing a place for Spirit. That's a tough thing to do.

How much easier it would have been just to go down the path of polytheism. I know of one fictional Hindu from *The Life of Pi* – an excellent novel and film – who laments: "Those poor Christians. They have only three gods."

No, my brother Hindu, we have one God. But look at the ways that God is made manifest to all of Creation.

There is God-out-there. That's called *transcendence*: a God so completely beyond as to dwell in purity, perfection and eternal joy.

There is God-right-here. That's called *imminence:* a God so completely close as to be present in the very fabric of all things – in the web of life.

And there is God-within. That's called *the indwelt life:* God at the innermost center of our being.

God is in all three places at the same time, without division; in perfect unity. This is a mystery. And quite honestly, we humans don’t like mystery. This quality seems to be a built-in part of us. We always want more. We want to know more; understand more. In fact, Christian theologian Ilia Delio says that what we want more of is: *being*. At every level of life – from the cellular on up – there is the desire for more being; the struggle to include what is in our environment and then transcend it. This isn’t about consumerism. Materialism can bring about *well-being*. But spirituality brings about *more being*.

We don’t like mystery but the value of having it is in where it leads us. It leads us to unfamiliar, uncomfortable territory where we cannot rely on rules and rigidity. They just don’t work. We must grapple with mystery; explore; lean into.

The Trinity is mystery. It is something we cannot really understand. We can only experience. When we experience the Trinity, we are in the world of the imagination, a place that is wholly, completely spiritual.

The Trinity is a fuller revelation of God as both mystery and paradox – an awareness of how much more God is than we can ever begin to comprehend, especially with our “religious” minds. It took a long boat trip for one bishop to learn this.

He set sail around the world with a small company of fellow travelers. Soon they came upon an island thought to be deserted. But the bishop spied smoke coming from the island and realized it was inhabited.

“I must go there,” he said to himself, “and bring them the Gospel!” So he set out in a dinghy and on the island encountered the oddest thing: three people who did everything together, always facing each other; always smiling at each other. Together they drew water; made their campfires; prepared their food.

They warmly welcomed the bishop who asked whether they knew how to pray. Pray? Why, they had never heard of such a thing. They were eager to learn. Alas, they weren’t what we would call a quick study.

The bishop began, “Our father,” and they repeated: “Our father.” “Who art in heaven.” “Who art in heaven.” “Great” said the bishop, “now put it all together.” “Put what together?” “Our father who art in heaven.”

Well, it went on like this for hours. The bishop could get them to remember a few lines of the great prayer of Christianity, then they’d forget and have to start over. Finally! Success! They got it. The entire Lord’s Prayer.

As the sun was setting the bishop said his goodbyes amidst protest from his friends who didn’t want him to depart. They embraced him warmly, bowed deeply, and then he was gone. He rowed back to the ship which soon set sail.

Days later and far out to sea, there was a commotion on deck among the passengers. At the stern of the ship they saw a faint image, in the horizon, drawing steadily nearer and nearer. In due time, it caught up with them. It was three people, arms linked together, running on the water. They approached the side of the ship and called for the bishop.

They said, “Help us, Holy Father, we have forgotten our prayer!” The bishop looked down upon them, bobbing on the top of the water, still smiling, still holding each other and said, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”