

**SAN MARINO CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**Reflections by Pastor Donald Shenk  
(AND The Honoring of Our Graduates)  
(Delivered on Sunday, June 11, 2017)**

Texts:

**Psalm 8** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Yahweh, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your Name in all the earth!  
You have placed your glory above the heavens!  
From the lips of infants and children  
you bring forth words of power and praise,  
to answer your adversaries  
and to silence the hostile and vengeful.

When I behold your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars which you set in place—  
what is humanity that you should be mindful of us?  
Who are we that you should care for us?  
You have made us barely less than God  
and crowned us with glory and honor.  
You have made us responsible  
for the works of your hands,  
putting all things at our feet—  
all sheep and oxen, yes, even the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, the fish of the sea  
and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

Yahweh, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your Name in all the earth!

**Matthew 28:16-20** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

The eleven made their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had summoned them. At the sight of the risen Christ they fell down in homage, though some doubted what they were seeing. Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words:

“All authority has been given me  
both in heaven and on earth;  
go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.  
Baptize them in the name of Abba God,  
and of the Only Begotten, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Teach them to carry out  
everything I have commanded you.  
And know that I am with you always,  
even until the end of the earth.”

## 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

And now, sisters and brothers, I must say goodbye. Mend your ways. Encourage one another. Live in harmony and peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones send greetings to you.

The grace of our Savior Jesus Christ and the love of God and the friendship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

### Reflections by Pastor Donald: **“Dance with US!”**

As I explored these fascinating scriptures and prepared for this time of reflection with you on Trinity Sunday, I found that many of my colleagues and go-to-commentators were feeling much the same about the Trinity. I think Karoline Lewis at Luther Seminary put it best when she wrote, “Any sermon that tries to explain the Trinity will likely end up as interesting as the proverbial watching paint dry... Do we really think that any of [our] efforts [to explain the Trinity] could possibly summarize what is already a human attempt to grasp the nature of God? This is our inclination, our instinct, however -- to domesticate wonder, to clarify awe, to tame transcendence.”

And so I shall try to not do any of those things today. Especially on a day when we are celebrating the matriculation of three of our finest young people as they head to college and embark upon their future where they will surely encounter much wonder, awe and transformation if not actual transcendence, although we certainly hope that for them.

I mean why should we be trying to define the Trinity when, as Karoline states later in her article, “A Trinitarian Difference,” “Jesus does not define or describe the Trinity, but rather articulates, [“Abba God, Only Begotten, and Holy Spirit”] for the sake of spreading the good news of God’s presence and imagining God’s kingdom here and now. Making disciples and baptizing does not require a formula or doctrine but only the needed words so as to witness to Emmanuel in the world. As such, “I am with you always” is a summary of the Trinity itself.”

And, indeed, this statement of complete security and comfort is what each of us can take from the idea of the Trinity and our ever loving, ever present God, “I am with you always.”

How well I remember those first times heading away from my parents and all that I knew and held dear to my heart. My security blanket was large and included fabric woven not only by my parents but by a very large extended family along with threads incorporated by my church peeps and schoolmates. Going off into the vast unknown was exciting, yes, but also terrifying and I wondered if God would truly be with me if I didn’t have God’s physical representation of what it meant to be covered by and

cared for so deeply by others in tangible reach. What is Linus without his blanket after all?

But as Professor Lewis says, “The Trinity asserts God with us. The Trinity affirms God’s presence. The Trinity avows that no matter what and in whatever circumstances God will be there.” Holding onto this understanding of God and the Trinitarian blanket that covers us all is one way of getting through all the challenges we face and all the roads we will go down as we live these lives of constant change in constantly changing times.

The Trinity, I think, is our sometimes-pitiful human attempt at getting to the heart of what God is. For God, we know, can never be one thing. Our God is far too big for one small box created by our limited understanding. God is not only our parent, the Creator, the maker of all things, but God is our sibling, the Christ, exemplified in Jesus as our friend, our savior, the one who redeems us and sees all the God within us, and God is Spirit, that great unexplainable mystery, the One who moves throughout all space and time and connects all of us in a vast web of love and caring, guiding our steps and motivating our hearts to bring us together as One in God even as the Trinity is One, though three.

Look at those interlocking shapes up there on our Triquetra (tr-eye-kwee-truh) or Trinity knot. You can see them as three separate symbols or you can trace your finger over each one and watch how they connect one to the other with no beginning and no end – the alpha and omega, forever and ever with the circle at its center emphasizing the unity of the whole combination of three forces as well as God’s love around the Holy Trinity.

In my work with Father Richard Rohr last fall out in New Mexico, we were led by Father Richard through pieces of his latest extraordinary book, “The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation.” There is much to be recommended from this book, but what struck me the most as I listened to him expound on the Trinity and the traditional idea of it being in the form of a triangle with God at the top, Jesus on one side and the Holy Spirit on the other, is when he asked us to consider flattening that triangle and making it into a circle instead so that we could imagine each aspect of God dancing with each other, thus eliminating the hierarchical understanding of the nature of God and realizing that within the Divine Dance all aspects of God are equal.

And then he really blew my mind when he said there was something missing from the circle and the dance at the Table of God, and that thing would be ME or YOU or whoever is present in God’s creation.

“Jesus comes forth from this Eternal Fullness,” he writes, “allowing us to see ourselves mirrored, as a part of this table fellowship—as a participant at this banquet

and as a partner in God's eternal dance of love and communion...I invite you to recognize that this Table is not reserved exclusively for the Three, nor is the divine circle dance a closed circle: all are invited in."

Our texts for today give us a beautiful understanding of our Triune God, not only in the essence of God which they each speak to but in the way they invite us to the table and involve all of us as part of this dancing circle and of understanding our own essence.

In Psalm 8, you can imagine yourself as the psalmist, nestled in the grass on the side of a hill as the sheep sleep and the cows chew, peering into the heavens and seeing the moon nestled in amongst the billions of stars and wondering at the One who created all this and still cares for we puny humans, nothing more than a speck on a speck and yet crowned with glory and honor, entrusted with the care and preservation of so much that is beautiful and right and true. What other words could pour forth than, "how majestic is your Name in all the earth!"

Then in Matthew we have the Christ, our savior, our redeemer, our friend, risen and returned coming to the disciples one last time, closing out Matthew's gospel with the words, "know that I am with you always, even until the end of the earth," assuring them of their worth, their place with God and their ability to baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity itself.

And finally, in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, once again at the very end of this epistle, an admonition to live in love with each other and to allow the Spirit of God to envelop them in harmony and peace; signing off with a beautiful definition of the Trinity at work in their lives, "the grace of our Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God and the friendship of the Holy Spirit." How beautiful, how encouraging, how wonderful to know that all the aspects of God follow us all of our days, blessing us and never leaving us alone.

"God is alive, many-faceted, and as wondrously complex as God's creation," Dr. Bruce Epperly wrote this week in his Trinity Sunday commentary. "As a planet, we barely matter; our lives as persons are brief in the context of the 14 billion year journey of the universe, and yet we matter to God and have a vocation right where we are on this tiny dot in space. Infinitesimal, we are yet of infinite worth." "The Trinity is best understood flexibly," he asserts. "We speak of what we can never fully understand, and must be open to diverse and growing understandings of what is most Sacred. Today, we are called to radical amazement, to awe and wonder, to the quest for beauty, and the commitment to love and create in the spirit of our Dynamic God. Trinity Sunday [can be] a day to celebrate a God who is still creating, who speaks in diverse ways, whose creativity and redemption embraces all creation, and who challenges us to go beyond all divisive and exclusive theologies to affirm the wonders of God's creative love."

As you dance with all the aspects of our wondrous God throughout your life, know that you are part of the creation, you are part of the life force you are part of the dance and you will always have a partner.

“What would you dream, dare and do if you believed that Jesus is with you, no matter what,” Dr. David Lose asked this week. “Not, mind you, what would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail – for most daring and faithful feats involve a fair amount of failure! – but rather what would you do if you knew that God was for you and with you no matter what and forever?”

The answer, my friends, can only be found in the dance.

Amen.

## HONORING OUR GRADUATES

What a JOY it is to celebrate the amazing young people we have with us today who are celebrating such a profound milestone in their lives.

We have three wonderful young people graduating from high school this month as well as one young man graduating from college, Justin Maldonado. Unfortunately, Justin and his family could not be with us today as he is receiving his diploma this hour, but we will see that he receives our blessings and this congratulatory card and gift.

But right now I’d like to invite our high school graduates and their parents forward – Faith and Peter Van Horsen along with their parents, Kim and Dave and Patrick Maglalang with his parents, Toy and Liza.

Faith, Peter and Patrick, it has been my great pleasure and the pleasure of this congregation to see each of you grow into adulthood and reach this massive milestone in your lives. *(After each of the tributes below the graduates shared with the congregation where they would be going to college and what their focus for future studies would be.)*

**Peter**, your ability to learn and adapt to every situation and to do it all with such coolness and ease has been especially noticed by all of us who benefit from your wonderful work with our sound system and slides. You will be greatly missed as we limp along without you when you go to college this fall. It’s been wonderful to have you hear most every Sunday and to be a part of your church family. Know that we will always be praying for you and keeping you in our hearts wherever you go.

**Faith**, your vivacity, intellect and flair for the dramatic have been noticed by all of us who have had the pleasure to work and worship with you over the years. I remember well the spark in your eyes when you started to get a taste for the theatre right here

as we put on our shows next door. I apologized to your parents for infecting you with “the bug” but I knew that you were bitten and could see your talent even then. You were certainly appropriately named for your faith is evident in your life and I am encouraged and excited by your spirit and where God will take you.

And **Patrick**. Although not as many people in our congregation have known you as long as they’ve known Peter and Faith who were basically born here, we have all been touched by your work and your spirit through your wonderful dad, our custodian Toy, and by all the ways you’ve helped out around here, most especially as part of our regular fruit picking team for Food Forward. My heart always leaps for joy when you step out of your dad’s truck at a pick because I know we’ll pick lots more fruit and be done so quickly with your excellent skills and cooperative spirit. There are some people in life that one meets and you just say, “there is a great person,” and you are definitely one of those people. I know you will be blessed throughout your life and will do amazing things in the years ahead.

It is our tradition here to award our graduates with a scholarship and an inspirational quote to guide them on their way.

Peter: Your quote is by the wonderful actor Alan Alda who said, “You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You can't get there by bus, only by hard work and risk and by not quite knowing what you're doing, but what you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover will be yourself.”

Faith: Your quote is from the extraordinary jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis who said: “It’s harder to build than destroy. To build is to engage and change. In jazz, we call progressing harmonies changes. Changes are like obstacles on a speed course. They demand your attention and require you to be present. They are coming...they are here..... and then they are gone. It's how life comes. Each moment is a procession from the future into the past and the sweet spot is always the present. Live in that sweet spot. Be present.”

Patrick: Your quote is from Larry Lucchino, the former president and CEO of the Boston Red Sox who said, “Life is not about warming yourself by the fire, life is about building the fire. And generosity is the match...If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap, but if you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody.”

Now graduates, you literally would not be here if it wasn’t for four very special people – your parents. And I’d like them to come up here and stand behind you all right now as we make a presentation to them.

Kim and Dave and Toy and Liza, you have given the world great gifts in these incredibly special and amazing people sitting in front of you today. We as a church

thank you for your dedication to their upbringing and for exemplifying lives well lived for God and for all of God's children.

For you, I have two quotes – the first from Elizabeth Stone who said, “Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.” which I think you can all relate to.

And the second is by Chuck Palahniuk who helps you look to your future as he says, “Parents are like God because you wanna know they're out there, and you want them to think well of you, but you really only call when you need something.”

But what I want to leave you all with are these words of scripture that put it better than anything:

First from Jeremiah 29, verse 11: For I know the plans I have for you,” declares God, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

And from Proverbs 2: “My children, if you heartily accept my words, and treasure my requirements, incline your ear to Wisdom, and take her truth into your heart. For if you yearn for insight and cry out for understanding, if you search for it as you would for silver, and dig for it as you would for buried treasure, you will understand what fear of Yahweh is, and discover how to truly know God...When Wisdom enters your heart and knowledge delights you, good judgment will protect you, and understanding will guard you.”