

CIRCLE OF LOVE

John 8

When they talk about great baseball teams, the 1998-2000 Yankees come into the discussion. You have to keep in mind that I was raised a Baltimore Orioles fan so I have always hated the Yankees. But I have to agree, that was a great team. They did have Hall of Famers Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera, but what marked that team was that they were a team. They liked each other and played well with each other. There were no big egos, just the team.

A good team like that is sort of like a windmill or a water wheel. Each part of those machines contributes equally to the effort of turning a rod to harness power. Each one works to force in the same direction to create a circular motion. When I visited our friend Kebede in Ethiopia, I got to see how they use oxen moving in circles to grind seeds for flour. To work effectively the oxen should be working in tandem as a team.

That is what we celebrate today in the Trinity—God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is not an intellectual exercise to explain God. The Trinity is not so much about who God is, but what He does. The Father shows us how God made us and protects us. The Son shows how God rescued us from sin. The Spirit shows how God gives us the life to follow Him. But above all what we see in the Trinity is the perfect team, a team based on perfect love.

We see this in the words Jesus spoke in our Gospel lesson:

If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ But you have not known Him. I know Him. If I were to say that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know Him and I keep His word.

Jesus never sought glory. It was always given to Him by the Father. With the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit there is no “keeping score” of who did what, just everything directed towards loving each other and directing that love to us. The Trinity shows us the perfect “circle of love.”

That is how God created us. We were made “In His image.” Those means are meant to be a part of that circle, receiving God’s love and giving it back to Him by loving others.

That may just seem to make sense. The book Team of Rivals is about how Abraham Lincoln used his political rivals to become members of his cabinet, who capably helped him get through the great crisis of the Civil War. Harry Truman engineered the recovery plan in Europe after World War 2 by calling it the “Marshall Plan,” naming it after Secretary of State Marshall

who was above politics. Truman said, “It is amazing what you can get done when you don’t worry about who gets credit for it.” Great things happen when people cooperate!

But we foul up God’s circle of love. I can talk about our petty jealousies, our greed, our insistence on our own way. We think of crime, war, injustice, rape, prejudice, stealing, and all the bad things people do to each other. But it is even deeper than that. Let’s not talk about criminals, corrupt politicians, the abusive wealthy, or the usual list of “bad guys.” What about with the people who seem to have their act together. Listen to this description of them:

Then do an even better you next time. And the next time, still. Onward and upward. The appeal of such sentiments is that they groom us into thinking that we are free agents in the world. Who doesn’t want that? Life becomes a series of challenges we can, in our self-declared freedom, overcome. Life also becomes a place with definable groups: the have-it-togethers and the messed up, the good and the bad, us and them. All we have to do is think smart, remain positive, and stay on the right side of history.

These high-sounding, humanity-exalting sentiments lose much of their charm when there’s a knock on your door at 11:30 PM and two Army officers are standing on your front porch. Or your mom calls, frantic as doctors try in vain to revive the heart of your already dead father. Or this, or that. We are all one day, one event, one disappointment away from the burst of our high anthropology bubble. Blessed is the bursting of that bubble.

What motivates our human efforts to work together—real love for each other or the benefits it gives “me”? We all end up breaking the “circle” by clinging to “me,” not God.

But God is not that way. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live and work in perfect love. That love is not based on what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can gain from each other. Jesus said, “The Father glorifies Me.” It is given, not paid for. That love reaches out to us, in making us, in forgiving us, and in leading us back to Him.

Jesus sacrificed Himself for us. He had nothing to gain from that. It did no personal benefit to Him. He didn’t do it to get our love in return, because as God, He does not need it and because he died for all people, even those who would not respond to His love. It is that love which forgives, which removes our sins which fouls up the circle. Now we can, even as sinners, be a part of God’s circle of love.

As we praise the Triune God, we are drawn into that circle of love. It is not that we can figure God out better, but we can have a wider view of what He does for us. God as Father shows our relationship with Him, not as some distant uncaring deity, but the Father who made us and cares for us out of love. In the Son, we see the extent of that love as he died for us on the cross. In the Holy Spirit, we see that God does not give up on us, that He is constantly after

us to receive His love and share it with others. The Trinity is God's love going through our lives and into the lives of others, back into our lives, and back to God, the source of it all.

It is that love that our children will see in the five stories they will learn during VBS this week. 1.) We hear about God calling Moses to free His people from slavery, calling Moses, not because he was so qualified, but so that God could show His power and love for His people through even a stutterer like Moses. 2.) God leads His people under Joshua across the Jordan River, not by their power or cleverness, but by parting the flooded waters before them. 3.) Jesus uses the example of the Good Samaritan to show how His love moves us to even love enemies. 4.) Jesus rises from the dead on Easter to free us from sin and death. 5.) Jesus ascends into heaven to confirm He is God and all His promises to us are true.

God bless us daily to be a part of that circle of love.