

**The Rev. Sylvia Sweeney**  
**TRINITY SUNDAY**  
**May 18, 2008**

You know one of the extraordinary things about parenting is you never know when the light bulbs are going to go on for your children. As much as we wish we could say to the children entrusted to our care... “Hey Joey, pay attention here, this is a moment that you should hold onto for the rest of your life” or by the same token, “Sorry Sarah just wipe that image out of your head forever, it’s not worth remembering.” It just doesn’t work that way. Children, and adults too for that matter, learn how to make sense of our world in teachable moments that appear in our lives through the coming together of some kind of spontaneous internal convergence of forces, insights, and energies. That’s what learning is.

In those teachable moments when our mind’s eyes are wide open, we learn lessons that have the power to shape who we are and how we understand the world for the rest of our lives. I think those moments are gifts from God, gifts we sometimes use wisely and sometimes squander.

Jesus came to the world at a teachable moment. What the disciples learned from Jesus had the power and potential to create more teachable moments for individuals...and for our world. The early church fathers and mothers used their teachable moments to shape a synthesis of spiritual realities that still impacts our faith even today. Spiritual insight supports new spiritual insight in a way that allows us to build, within ourselves, great cathedrals to God, formed of the matter and substance of the human heart—Cathedrals that are in their own way as holy, as awe inspiring and as grand as a Notre Dame, the Grand Canyon, or the Milky Way. Do you believe that? Do you believe that through the working of the Holy Spirit, your own personal spiritual interior can be a beautiful cathedral built and dedicated to God?

This Trinity Sunday let me tell you about an unanticipated teachable moment in my life. It's a moment that, in truth, probably no one in the world remembers, except me...and, of course, the Holy Spirit.

When I was 7 or 8 and had a growth spurt in the middle of the school year, my mother had to take me out shopping to JC Penney for new school clothes. My mom pulled out a few dresses that were the right price and asked me to help decide which ones I liked so that I could go try them on, and just as we were getting ready to walk to the dressing room, a black woman who was shopping in the same little girl's dresses section of the store walked up to my mother and said "Excuse me but I wonder if I might ask a favor" "I'm trying to find a dress for my little granddaughter and she could be the twin of your little girl. Would your daughter mind trying on this dress so I can see what it might look like on my granddaughter?" And my mother said, of course I'd be happy to. We took the dress with us into the dressing room and the whole time while I put this dress on and while I modeled it for my mother and this grandmother and while they talked about how it looked on me, I was thinking "I have a twin". "I have a twin who looks like me, except that she is black and I am white." I was amazed and actually quite pleased to learn you could have a twin who was a different color than you.

I learned something incredibly important to me that day that I'm not sure anyone had set out to teach me. I learned that even when we are different, there is something within us, something basic to us that unites us to each other. I learned that day that if I only paid attention, I would keep finding people who even though they were different, were still like me.

There is a picture that hangs in my office that is one of my prize possessions. It's actually a framed postcard. Many years ago now I taught a class at church called Sexism and God-talk . Together we read a book by the same title, and in that book there was a description of

an incredible image of the Trinitarian God that was on a medieval painting in a church in Germany. Months after the class, one of the people who was in the class was in the area where this church was, and she made a point of going to see the painting and bringing me back a postcard of it.

In the painting there are three figures, as one would expect with a painting of the Trinity, but in this picture there are two men and a woman. The woman stands in the middle and the two men have their arms draped over her shoulder and onto her chest in a posture of deep intimacy and familiarity. There is no doubt when you look at this picture that they are a family and all three of these persons truly love each other mutually and equally.

The painting is one of a handful of feminine human representations of God that exists in pre-modern Christian religious art. That painting offered all who saw it when it was first painted in the Middle Ages, and all who see it still, a fuller picture of the divinity of the Trinity. It is a representation of what we know, but what we too quickly forget; that we are all created in the image of God.

Indeed, this day, this Trinity Sunday, reminds us that the nature of God is about one in many and many in one, unity in diversity and diversity in unity, love in the midst of all that we share in common and all that makes us unique.

God's divine love is about relating to something or someone beyond ourselves. It's about mutuality and intimacy and connectedness that celebrates difference and variation and cosmic diversity as the very song of Life and Love. God is the one who loves and is loved in the fullness of all being. God is the one who created a world built on a set of common building blocks but arranged and rearranged in such startling, complex and intricate patterns that everywhere we look there is something new being born! Something that is new and different and

unique and yet still oh so connected to who and what we are! God has made us to be as different and connected to one another and to all creation as the Father is to the Son is to the Life Giving, World Transforming, Dancing, Singing, Laughing Spirit that binds us oh so gently and yet firmly one to another ... and one another to God.

When the early church developed a theology of the Trinity. When the 1<sup>st</sup> disciples found that the only way they could describe their experience of God was by speaking of three separate, different, and yet deeply united persons. When the church acknowledged that the created world had been saved by an incarnate Savior and was clearly being sustained by a comforting, teaching presence in the hearts and lives of its members, it also left us with another truth about who and what we are.

We are the products and the beneficiaries of a God who loves deeply, loves intimately, loves magnanimously and invites us deeper and deeper into the mystery, the awe, and the wonder of Life. We are created in the image of a God whose deepest nature is love itself. And God said, Let us make humankind in our own image. So God created humankind in God's own image, in the image of God she created them; male and female he created them. In God's eyes, we are all twins.