

Daring to Dance With the Questions

John 16:12-15

YEAR C - Trinity Sunday – Sunday, May 30, 2010

St. James Westminster – Rev'd Val Kenyon

The name Charles M. Schulz when spoken, likely conjures up for most of us, images of a quirky collection of characters created by him in a syndicated daily and Sunday comic strip *Peanuts*, which ran for 50 years until Shultz's death in the year 2,000.

You may remember among the characters Charlie Brown, of course, the main character and something of a loveable loser, Snoopy his ever-present dog, Linus, Lucy, Schroder (forever bent over his piano in imitation of his beloved Beethoven), Pig-Pen who always seemed to travel in a cloud, and Peppermint Patty, a freckled-faced tomboy, who was positively aglow with self confidence and who by-the-by had a crush on poor Charlie Brown.

If you followed the comic strip and later television specials you probably have your own favourite memories of these characters in their struggles towards adulthood, but I have several of Peppermint Patty which I found myself remembering on this Trinity Sunday. In one instance, Peppermint Patty steps up to the store counter in a PEANUTS cartoon where she says, "Yes sir...I need some school supplies ... some pencils, some paper, a loose-leaf binder ... and some answers ... I need a lot of answers". On one other occasion we see Patty seated at her desk in class and staring blankly at a test paper she has just received. Over her head we see the bubble that reads, "I know everything ... except the answers."

So why think of Peppermint Patty on Trinity Sunday? Well, this is a Sunday so named to encourage us to reflect upon Christianity's belief in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, as we have just sung, ...#1 in our current hymn book ... Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty God in three persons, blessed Trinity. This idea is not an easy concept to grasp, one God yet three beings and like Peppermint Patty, we may well find ourselves a little short of answers at the end of the day.

But one thing is sure. On this Sunday we share with Christians around the world and indeed with Christians down through the ages a desire to understand who God is, what God is like, how and where God is at work in the world. We see in the church's explanation of the Trinity an attempt, a willingness to grapple with the immensity that is God, and to put into terms that we can understand, something of what is God, where we the finite try to define the infinite. In a certain way it is a willingness to dance with the questions realizing that, not unlike in other aspects of our lives, our understanding of God is likely something that develops over time as we are able to embrace not so much new truth, but new understandings of those truths.

We see something of this in John's Gospel as we hear Jesus' words to his disciples, as he prepares to leave them. Anticipating that their lives without his physical presence will be difficult Jesus offers them reassurance as he tells them that when he goes the Spirit of Truth will then be sent to them and that this Spirit will guide them into all truth, passing along to them whatever he hears presumably from God the Father and God the Son. Yet how this passage begins is also important as we read, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Jesus knew what they could handle and what they could not, and so we have to conclude that in our lives as Christians there will be times when aspects of our understanding just have to wait.

As our spiritual lives grow and develop, our understanding develops in phases and stages. We could also see this text encouraging us that as Christians we are asked to stay open to fresh encounters with the revelation of Jesus, receptive to Spirit-guided growth as God's Spirit presents itself into both our lives and into the world around us. As the world around us changes and new circumstances and questions arise in the church and society in which we find ourselves, are we willing to engage the questions? Are we daring enough to dance with the questions?

Two Sundays ago, Graham, Mike and I and the four delegates to Synod attended the 168th Session of the Synod of the Diocese of Huron. The keynote speakers brought us a challenge, asking us to look at what it means to be Anglican Christians in an age and culture where following Jesus is not valued. They reminded us that we live in a world, and in a community just outside our front doors, where there are many people who don't even know who Jesus is, and that if we are open to them, there are fresh and new opportunities popping up for us to live out the Gospel in our communities through which we can demonstrate the power of the love and grace of God.

Do we know the questions that live in the hearts and minds of those for whom Christianity has no meaning, or for those who would never think to cross through the door of a church? How are we called to be faithful to the Gospel in the present age and into what understanding of truth does the Spirit wish to guide us in 2010, in London, Ontario?

While at Synod, in one of the key speakers' presentations we saw a picture of the Choluteca Bridge in Honduras. Perhaps you've heard of it. In November of 1998, Hurricane Mitch ravaged the area. 5,600 people died. 12,300 were injured and 8,600 disappeared. In addition to this tragic loss of human life, 150 bridges were damaged or destroyed. The most modern of all the bridges, the Choluteca Bridge, survived intact but suffered perhaps the greatest indignity: the river moved right out from under it. The bridge, apparently, was an engineering marvel, donated by the Japanese. For years, this bridge served its purpose of getting people over the river. After the storm, the tool *itself* didn't change. It was so properly built, so perfect for its purpose, that not even the monstrous shifting sands around it could put even a dent in it.

But those very shifting sands did something else, and moved the river away from the bridge, rendering it useless. In effect, leaving it out of touch with its new reality. So as we wait upon this Spirit of Truth, this Spirit of God that leads us into all truth, we have to get a little comfortable with being uncomfortable in this brave new world where we know that participation in organized religion is dwindling and yet spiritual hunger remains high. I don't mean by this that we abandon our traditional church practices, but rather I find myself wondering into what new things, what fresh expressions of being guided into "all truth", There is for us to discover where new expressions of church can be celebrated alongside the traditional in mutual respect and support.

Now I would not like to suggest for one moment that this "daring to dance with the questions" is an easy task. We may well feel that the world in which we live is constantly shifting and that the rules are changing almost as fast as they are made, and that it is all we can do to keep a foothold while reaching to grab the latest ball tossed in our direction. To quote, the Rev'd Canon Catherine Ascah, someone well known to St. James as she was called from this parish into ordained ministry, in a commentary appearing in the online version of the Anglican Journal, "As Anglicans we hold our tradition dearly because it is a good tradition: authority of Scriptures, use of reason and skill, deeply spiritual prayer, profoundly moving liturgy, governance. But ours is a tradition born out of reformation...we resist change because change requires effort and work. It requires us to face our fears and uncertainties."

On this Trinity Sunday, which is certainly an acknowledgment of the mystery of God we also celebrate both the diversity of the Godhead, and the diversity of the ways in which we experience God and how that changes and grows as we come to a greater understanding of how God moves and lives among us.

It's difficult to make sense of "one" and "three", when we think of Christian faith in one personal God who has three distinct ways of being and acting as God. Yet the greater truth is that the Trinity is a mystery to be expressed not so much a mathematical problem to be solved.

But in and through all of this, carefully and prayerfully, as disciples of the risen Lord, we, as individuals and as a community dare to dance with the questions, confident in the guiding of this Spirit who knowing us better than we know ourselves will faithfully lead us into all truth. May God make it so.