

Connected to the Source

Sermon by Pastor Patricia Geiseman
The Festival of the Holy Trinity
May 26-27, 2018
John 3:1-17 and Isaiah 6:1-8

Memorial Day weekend is upon us. For many, this means a long weekend, an extra day off. Even the church office is closed on Monday!

But the stores will be open. And it seems that just about everything is on sale ... from cars and clothes, furniture and flowers, hamburger buns and hot dogs. There will be parades and picnics, cookouts and crocks...

We will also be welcoming record-breaking heat, which will mark for us the beginning of the summer season.

The main message seems to be, "Celebrate! Shop. Eat. Enjoy the day!"

But we know that it is more than this. Memorial Day began after the Civil War as Decoration Day on May 30, 1868, as a day to remember the fallen who gave their lives in the mostly costly war of all. According to tradition, General John A. Logan initiated this commemoration. But, like many traditions and customs, there were likely many beginnings. Closer reading reveals that on May 1, 1865, over a thousand of recently freed slaves held a remembrance to consecrate a new, proper burial site for the Union dead. The group sang hymns, gave readings, and distributed flowers around the cemetery.

Memorial Day became a legal holiday in 1971. The date was moved from May 30 to the last Monday in May in order to give federal employees a long weekend.

It is important—and necessary—to remember our own history, to allow ourselves to feel the weight of wars' cost, to grieve young lives lost, families devastated, and a nation torn apart.

Civil War seems to be the worst kind of war, no matter where or when it takes place. Like in the movie "The War of the Roses." The violence we inflict on those closest to us seems the most inhumane and cruel. Yet wars, division, and violence persist, here at home in the U.S. and globally. Young lives are still lost, families still devastated, and nations are torn apart ... in Syria, Myanmar, Palestine ... and Sante Fe.

We will need more than picnics and parades, new sandals and shorts to mend the brokenness.

Sometimes amid the fires and floods, violence and mayhem, we see people praying and crossing themselves “in the name of the Father + Son and Holy Spirit.” Praying for what? We can imagine. Comfort. Healing. Peace. A new plan.

And so it is with this history and this present, this reality and weight, that we gather on this weekend for worship. We take time out to remember and give thanks for another reality, a dependable truth: the Good News that God loves the world.

Our world. We gather to be connected to the Source of Love that desires wellbeing.

Without this lifesaving connection we could become hardened, angry, bitter, and very, very afraid.

In addition to being Memorial Day weekend, this is The Festival of the Holy Trinity. The liturgical color is white, like Easter and Christmas. This is the only festival that celebrates a teaching of the church.

We confess our faith in God, revealed and experienced as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We baptize, confirm, marry, bury, and bless with this Trinitarian formula.

One of the most popular hymns to sing on this day is “Holy, Holy, Holy.” I understand that this was a top favorite of the congregation years ago and was the opening hymn almost every Sunday.

The text for this hymn is from our lesson in Isaiah: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” (Isaiah 6:3b, NRSV)

The verses tell of Isaiah’s vision and call. The call came at time of political turmoil, despair, and uncertainty. Judah was facing certain attack and conquer by a foreign enemy. Assyria was a powerful bully nation, which dominated Judah’s neighbors, Syria and Israel.

These two nations looked to Judah for support, hoping to oppose Assyria together. Ahaz, the Judean king was indecisive and afraid.

Into this tense time, Isaiah has a dramatic encounter with the living God. Isaiah’s vision was loud and decisive. Complete sensory overload! Visually the Holy Presence filled the space with a robe longer than Meghan Markle’s wedding veil!

Winged seraphs screamed in Isaiah’ ears. The temple shook. This certainly got his attention. Isaiah stood, humbled, inadequate, purified, and ready for a new role to bear a divine message.

Being a prophet was not an easy task. Usually it was the call that ordinary people received from the HOLY. The role was not to predict the future but to speak the truth about the present. Even if it wasn’t what the people wanted to hear.

Sometimes the Old Testament Book of Isaiah is called the “fifth gospel.” It is that full of good news—courage and call.

We may never have a vision like Isaiah’s, but we are called into new ways of seeing and being. We are urged to see our own history and present time through the lens of God’s agenda, to look for meaning, and to remember that the HOLY requires our lives be marked by justice and love.

“For God so loved the world.” God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

We know that Jesus did not come to teach the catechism or doctrines. He came to participate fully in God. And invites us to do the same!

The most popular symbol for the Trinity is an equilateral triangle. Trinitarian life with God is an archetype for our own relationships. When we greet each other with the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the communion of the Spirit, we are invited to participate again in life that is mutually supportive and nonhierarchical. Life where we are given the freedom to become ourselves.

Life like the Trinity, balanced—even, spacious—is the model and invitation for our own lives.

The Holy One, with fire and smoke, fear and shaking, called Isaiah to speak to the people.

Like Isaiah, we stand with shortcomings and inadequacies of our own. And like the prophet, we are not eliminated from service.

To trust in the Triune God is to be in relationship with One who comes in our time, is revealed in our worship, and sends us out to the face the sad realities of the world with healing peace.

Maybe you have read about the current Ebola outbreak in Congo. If the disease remains rural, the use of the experimental vaccine will keep it contained. But if it breaks out in a nearby city of more than a million people, or down river, it will mean trouble.

The good news, according to the National Institution of Health (NIH), is that the response this time is vastly further along than in the past. Michael Gerson, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, wrote “Congo has had 8 outbreaks of Ebola before this one, each defeated. A lot of good people, representing a number of global institutions are working to ensure the ninth ends the same way. When it comes to health, the world has become a single, massive body. A serious infection arriving at the weakest part can easily spread to the whole.” [1]

On Wednesday, the political cartoon in the local *Daily Herald* was captioned “Responses to deadly epidemics” and it depicted one vaccination syringe for influenza, one for Ebola, one for typhoid. In the fourth square, the vaccination for the epidemic for school shootings was a flag at half-staff with the words “thoughts and prayers” below.
[2]

Like the U.S. at the end of the Civil War, like the U.S. and Japan and Germany at the end of World War II, it is time to come together to recognize that, despite our differences, our common interest is in the joys, growth, and safety of our children and our communities. We must be about this kind of justice.

For our Mother’s Day Outreach this year, we raised more than \$3,000 through ELCA Good Gifts in order that children can be vaccinated. This means that 100 children will be able to grow up, with the health needed to become themselves.

Being the Church means participating in God’s life-giving relationship with the world.

Last week there was a fire in the Oak Ave house we support through Emmanuel House, now called The Neighbor Project. Florent and Carin and their children, who come from Congo, are safe. Because of our Visioning, our partnership, and our decision to set aside a tithe of our Capital Campaign monies, we have the resources to help with some temporary needs.

This is justice. Working for life that is mutually supportive and nonhierarchical. Balanced and even. Gracious and spacious.

During the Easter season, I read President Jimmy Carter’s new book, *Faith: A Journey for All*. I commend it to you. You may remember that, after his presidency, President Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, founded the Carter Center, which works across the world to advance human rights and alleviate poverty. In 2002 Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. At age 93, he teaches courses at Emory University, volunteers for Habitat for Humanity, and teaches Sunday School at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia.

In an interview about his book, the 93-year-old responded, “I have faith that God is slowly bending eternity toward redemption, and that someday ... moral perfection based on love as expressed by Jesus Christ will prevail.”

The interviewer asked, “What gives you a basis for this kind of hopefulness?”

“The history of America gives me hope. We have been through some very trying times in the past, and the resilience of our country and the principles of our constitution have always prevailed. I have confidence that in the future we’ll do the same thing, despite the difficulties we face today.”

President Carter changes his Sunday School lesson to accommodate modern-day headlines. One of his favorite Bible verses is “Be kind to one another and tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32, NRSV)

That’s a challenge. “The next step in the evolution of human beings has to be learning how to live with each other in peace and with some degree of love.” [3]

On The Festival of the Holy Spirit, we step onto this dance floor. We get in rhythm with the music that makes the world go ’round. As the words of hymn “Come, Join the Dance of Trinity” invite us, we join in the dance, in the “interweaving of the Three” made possible by “hope and love.” [4]

The freedoms we give thanks for this holiday weekend allow us to do more than cook hamburgers and go shopping.

Our freedom—as people of God and as Americans—provides the space and the responsibility to hear the call of those who need fairness, friendship, care, and compassion.

We are invited to a Vision beyond the smoke of violence and the fog of fear to imagine and work for a better world which is both promised and possible.

Amen.

Resources:

[1] Michael Gerson, as cited in *Daily Herald*, May 22, 2018.

[2] *Daily Herald*, May 22, 2018.

[3] “Why Jimmy Carter is hopeful,” Elizabeth Palmer interviews Jimmy Carter, *The Christian Century*, May 23, 2018.

[4] “Come, Join the Dance of Trinity,” Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Hymn 412.