
Slippery Fish and the Truth We Cannot Bear

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Ashley Carr
The First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday, Year C

Infamously, at Episcopal Churches all around the country, the Trinity Sunday preaching slot is relegated to someone like the seminarian. Upon learning that I was assigned to this Sunday, I found myself humbled to realize that I am, in fact, the last link in the Cathedral clergy food chain. It's a tricky Sunday to preach because the Trinity is a bit of a slippery fish. Just as soon as you think you understand it, or God forbid, try to explain it, you've lost your theological grip and landed yourself in a puddle of heresy. Neapolitan ice cream, water, ice and steam, peanut butter, jelly, and bread, are all the usual analogies that simply do not do justice to the theology, experience, or inkling of understanding of Holy Trinity.

So, I will spare you analogies, belabored metaphors, and Greek lessons. If you find yourself disappointed, you can easily find those sermons by doing a quick Google search for Trinity Sunday Episcopal Sermons. Godspeed.

Instead, I wonder if you might indulge me in meeting Jesus and his friends. We meet them today in John's gospel as Jesus is preparing the disciples for life without the physical Jesus in front of them. They were anxious, scared, uncertain and Jesus knew all of that, so he spent real intentional time before his crucifixion to set them up for success once he'd gone. Their reality would soon become that which we live today. Day in and day out left with memories, stories, lessons of Jesus without the real source to confirm or deny any understanding or lack thereof.

Getting ready to go, Jesus tells his friends that there is more for him to say, more for them to learn, but that they could not bear it. What sorts of things can we not bear to hear? Most minds would immediately think of hard realities, sick loved ones, impending change, destruction, injustice, loss. Big giant worldly plagues. Perhaps we cannot bear even those tiny difficult realities in our own small bubbles. This week I learned that the old oak tree where I played as a child needs to be cut down. I spent more time there in and around that tree than I could begin to calculate. I cannot bear the notion that it will be gone when next I visit. We cannot bear that which brings grief and sadness.

We also cannot bear unimaginable goodness. Those things which bring tears to our eyes because smiles only go so far, and our bodies simply cannot contain all of the goodness. You know the moments. Perhaps, marveling at what God has done in creation, hearing the angelic music of a church choir, the smell of a newborn baby. For me, I experience that kind of leveled flat goodness when I watch my children play. With joy and innocence that will be snatched from them as they age, I watch their imaginations whirling, their able bodies living out the stories in their heads, and I am struck that there is almost nothing as pure. I often have to look away. It is so good I simply cannot bear it.

What could Jesus say that the disciples could not bear? Was it bad or good? Was it both? We can't know for sure. But we know that Jesus knew that he was going to need reinforcements, somebody else needed to get involved in his ministry, his teaching, especially if he wasn't going to be around to have the final say. Jesus knew that in his absence, the Holy Spirit would be essential in helping his friends, in helping us, to understand whatever truths we can or cannot bear, truths hard and truths good.

The Spirit of truth will come, Jesus says. The Spirit of truth will guide you, us, into all truth. Not coerce, not impose, not threaten, but guide. The Spirit will not speak on its own but will speak whatever it hears, will declare what is to come, and will glorify Jesus. From God the Father, to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit, to us. That is

how this thing called truth, God's truth, comes to live in our hearts.

Do you hear how dynamic and fluid this revelation of truth is? It's not a one-time dose of truth that equips us for life. It's ongoing revelation.

That humbles me, I hope it humbles you.

No one of us, no one in fancy clothes, no father, no mother, no child, no one in books, no one in our screens, no one in trenches, no one in castles has all the truth. No *one* has all of God's truth. The Holy Spirit will bring ongoing little bits of truth to all of us, little micro understandings of what Jesus has for us, for our communities, for this entire world. Truths that are much bigger than facts, much deeper than our sense of certainty, truths that we simply may not be able to bear. In fact, I would venture to say that as the Spirit reveals something to us that we cannot bear, that is a likely indication that it's that Jesus level real deal capital T Truth.

I'll speak for myself, perhaps you've had this moment too. There are many times that I've thought that my truth is truer than another's truth. I hope I am alone in that, but I don't think I am. The battles we lock into about truth, are often so far from that real divine truth that the Spirit is desperately trying to guide us into.

This Spirit fed truth that Jesus wants us to have, that Jesus knows we need, cannot, will not, should not spew out of us in intellectual battles of facts and figures, stats and fear, right and wrong, arms crossed, foot stomp. That's not truth. When we absorb the real truth that the Spirit brings, instead we find our lives living in harmony with all that Jesus taught us. Because you see, there is really one truth for us believers and that's Jesus, all that he was, is, continues to be. Shepherd, savior, joy bearer, mercy, grace, love. That's truth. That's the stuff we can hardly bear.

Can you even imagine if all of us could live in accordance with love? Each of us moving through life in lockstep with love filling the space between us? I cannot bear the thought.

Truth is created within the God's incredible and mysterious design, made known to us in the life and teaching Jesus Christ, sustained in us by the Holy Spirit, that truth is the ticket to our common life together. Truth is shared among God's children, not hoarded by one as weapon against another. There is not my truth and your truth. That's just not the real deal. There is one truth shared with us through the Holy Spirit who, by the way, is not picking choosing who gets to receive it. It's not merit based, it's not about how smart you are, how much community service you do, or how often you're at church, none of that. The truth that the Spirit brings to us is available to everyone. I find that hard to bear. That there are faithful children of God so opposite of me who are also worthy of and recipients of truth. Yikes, and yet. That is the wide goodness and broad mercy of our God.

Truth is hard to bear.

I wonder if our prayers could dare to ask the Spirit for that which we cannot bear. Could our postures shift away from some certainty of truth to an openness that the Spirit is revealing that one truth all of the time to each of us in small parts? In ways that resonate with our make-up, the way God created each of us in our own wild and wonderful ways. Could we bear to pray for that truth which is for us and for everyone else?

It takes humility to live lives of faith.

It takes courage to invite the unbearable.

It takes God, three in one, to guide each of us in truth which passes all understanding.