

Holy Trinity
5/30/11 CTK

John 3:1-17; Romans 8:12-17

“What’s in a name?” That’s what Juliet asks as she stands on her balcony gazing up at the stars in the night sky. She’s been to a masked ball, a dance, and she’s fallen in love with a boy named Romeo. You know the story, their names are bound together by the story of their love. But their names are also Montague and Capulet, and those names are death to each other. For Juliet, all that matters is that she and Romeo are in love. And we know she’s right, in our hearts, but we also know human nature, we know what sin and intolerance and hatred can do and that names can divide as well as unite. Unfortunately so did Shakespeare. So things do not end well for Juliet and her Romeo.

Names, the names we give, the names we take for ourselves, have power. Power to unite, and power to divide. Republican and Democrat. We just have to say those names and each of us recognizes immediately how absolutely polarizing and divisive names can be if we let them.

Ask anybody who is choosing a name for their baby. Will they get grandpa’s name to please him and make that side of the family happy. Or we sneak auntie’s name in there somewhere in honor of her and her side of the family. Or, should we just give up, show our rebelliousness like Frank Zappa when he named his baby daughter Moon Unit.

Denominations: the word denomination, actually, comes from the Greek root *nomos*, meaning name. What’s in a denomination? We call ourselves Lutherans - which brings up a lot of imagery for some people – beer and brats, a brave and grumpy ex-monk who changed the world; grace. Lutherans. But there’s more; we are ELCA which unites us, makes us a tribe, a family but also separates us from other Lutherans - Missouri Synod Lutherans, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, NALC Lutherans.

In the Thirty Years War after the Reformation in Europe millions and millions of Christians divided by their names died by one another’s hands. The so-called “Troubles” in Ireland in the 20th Century set neighbor against neighbor, because some were named Catholic and some were named Protestant. This conflict, by the way, has recently threatened to raise its ugly head again.

Today, on the Sunday of the Holy Trinity we lift up a name that has great power to unite. It is meant to unite. It's a name whose meaning itself binds us together, creates community, among not only all Christians but all humanity. Because by naming God a Holy Trinity, we put our faith in a God who actually *is* unity and oneness even in diversity. And if this sounds ineffable and mystical, that's because it is. Friends who went to Catholic parochial school have told me that the nuns used to straight up tell them not to try to explain or understand, intellectually, the Trinity. Even the metaphors we usually use fall short. An egg, a shamrock, an apple.

Our faith in the Trinity embraces a God who is three, and yet one, in the same mystical sense that we here today, fifteen or so of us, are one. Even though each of us has a different name, we are bound together by our love for God and for each other. We are Christ the King. And that is a name, which has a great deal of meaning for us and, we believe, for those who will come after us.

So it is with the name of the Holy Trinity. We're like jugglers keeping three balls in motion at once. God the Father is the name of the creator of all that is, seen and unseen as we say in our Creed. Yes, and we also believe that God born in Jesus of Nazareth, and crucified for our sake and is named Christ, the Son of God. And we confess that in Jesus' resurrection, and Ascension, God, whose name is also Holy Spirit, and who breathed creation into being through the Father, breathed life into the church through the Son. One with God the Father and with Christ the Son even as the Father and the Son are one.

Jesus uses this kind of language in John's gospel when he prays that as he and the Father are one so the disciples may be one with the Father and with him and that the Spirit too is coming to empower them and make them one. It just all swirls around. This is the language the Paul uses today in his letter to the Romans, language that entwines names of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit into one. This is the language of God as relationship, a relationship of love as John says in his first epistle. And it's a relationship of love among the community of Father, Son, Holy Spirit, into which we are invited.

When the fathers and mothers of the church looked for an image, which is really the only way we can talk about God, they came upon the Greek word *perichoresis*. *Perichoresis* literally means "circling, going around" as in a dance, really. And that's how they said the Holy Trinity works. Like a dance. A dance among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each involved in each other's work of creating and

redeeming and sanctifying. And it's a dance into which we, by virtue of our adoption through Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, are invited to participate. And, just as surely as Romeo and Juliet fell in love when they danced at the masked ball, we are invited to fall in love and stay in love with God and one another in the dance of the Holy Trinity.

What's in a name? A lot in the name Holy Trinity. Of all the names that God has been called in all the religions and all the denominations of history, we choose to call God a name that means one-ness, unity, love. It's a name that has the power to bind us together, more than any name could ever keep us apart.