

A Vision of Trinity
Trinity Episcopal Church
Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord
January 10, 2010, 9:00 a.m.
Isaiah 43:1-7, Psalm 29, Acts 8:14-17, Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
The Rev. Charles A. de Kay

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good morning!

Over the last few weeks I've had a chance to reflect on our life together, the rich complexities of who we are, as Trinity Episcopal Church at 218 East Benton Street in downtown Aurora. This morning I'd like to share some of these reflections with you, and see if they match with your own.

It seems to me that we are -- Trinity Episcopal Church is -- many things. We are a historic church in downtown Aurora, Illinois, which is living into current realities, as we imagine an ever brighter future for tomorrow. In the last year, we proudly claimed our deep historical roots as we celebrated 160 years of ministry in Aurora -- 138 of them in this very building. While we were busy owning our rich past, we wrote the mission statement that reflects who we are and what we see as our purpose today. All of this is nestled in our faith in the unfolding of God's plan of reconciliation and restoration, that all of creation is being reconciled to God and that God's kingdom is being brought to its completion and fruition, in part, through us.

We are many things. We are a complete, cohesive independent entity, which lives as a part of a larger reality. We are a local branch, of an area deanery, of a regional diocese, of a national church which is part of a global enterprise, the worldwide Anglican Communion. We partner in our work with other Episcopalians in the Sandwich Board, educational opportunities, and fellowship, as in the ECW; we partner with a wide variety of other local Christian churches in Alpha, the CROP Walk, and even softball; we partner with a host of different religious traditions -- Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Ba'hai, and more -- for truly Ecumenical worship; and we partner with secular organizations from the Association for Individual Development to the United Way; from the Kiwanis to US Department of Homeland Security. (There is beginning to be dynamic overlap as our friendships from one effort join us in another: this winter, for instance, the Sandwich Board received unexpected assistance from Nathaniel, a young man from Warehouse Church, who over the last couple of weeks in turn has brought different members of his own family to help.)

We are many things. We are a whole comprised of many parts. We are a unity comprised of a stunning diversity. We are families and single people. We are infants and we are in our 90's. We are local and we come from miles away. We are rooted in our communities; we just arrived in town. We can trace our families back to the church's founding, and we are new to the church this year. We were baptized here decades ago, we were married here last year, we will be baptized here in the near future. We have deep roots in the Episcopal Church; the Episcopal Church is a new and mysterious entity we're just beginning to explore. We are wealthy; we are comfortable; we are struggling; we are poor. We speak English, Spanish, German, French, Arabic, Swahili, and a variety of dialects.

We are many things. We describe ourselves (we imagine ourselves and we understand ourselves) as a family, a community, a hub of human connection, where we work together, pray together, eat together, and play together. We care deeply for one another, and are a support when any one is facing hardships of any kind – emotional, financial, physical, or spiritual.

We are a spiritual home; we are a house of worship, where the word is preached and the sacraments distributed at least twice a week, and we're a center of prayer throughout the week. More and more we are becoming a place of learning and study, for adults as well as children. This year we envision a minor explosion of educational opportunities for grown ups on Sundays, midweek, and more.

We are called to act as the body of Christ in the world: we are a center for Jubilee Ministry – welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless – and generally seeking to shower God's love on all we encounter, the need, my friends, is universal.

We are many good, worthy, and sometimes even exceptional things: both individually and corporately.

At our core, at our essence, we are a community of hope. We are the custodians of the life-giving story of hope. It's a hope birthed in faith, handed down from generation to generation, and lived out in our own time. It's a mysterious Hope experienced in the most unexpected ways. Hope springing unabashedly and unrepentantly from a story of reversal of fortunes, of the underdogs who become champions, of the outcasts becoming the beloved leaders, of the most zealous sinner who becomes an instrument of salvation for the world, of the faithful remnant of a decimated community who rise from the ashes of their past to lead the way back to the promised land.

At our Baptism, we are made full members of this precious community of hope, we are entrusted with the story, and we claim our place in the unfolding story. The hope is for us, as well as for the world. It's the living hope – the expectation even -- that each of us will know the healing, miraculous love of God in our lives. The hope that we will grow, more and more, into the image of God ourselves that we were born to be. The expectation that God's will for each and every one of us is greater, more fulfilling, more life-giving, more abundant than anything that we can imagine for ourselves.

At various times throughout the year, such as today, we are reminded of that significant moment, our Baptism -- where it all began for each of us, and from whence our calling springs -- and we are invited to renew our commitment to the vows as we take our own place in the ongoing life-giving story of salvation. Here we are reminded once more of the essentials of the faith, the heart of our hope.

And so it is my privilege, it is my honor, it is my solemn duty and my joy, to say to you:

“Dear People of God: In Holy Baptism we follow the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ. As he came up from the water he was anointed by the Spirit of God and designated as God's Son. So we are also anointed by that same Spirit; we are reborn and adopted as sons and daughters with whom God is well pleased. Let us now renew our own Baptismal Covenant.”¹

¹ Michael W. Merriman, vice-dean and precenter, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco: “Invitations to Renew the Baptismal Covenant.”

Please turn to page 292 of the black Book of Common Prayer.