

Trinity Sunday 2018

“Jesus has gone viral”

Different things go viral on the internet all the time. For example, a few weeks ago some of you may have participated in a little test: Yanny or Laurel? This is a sound clip that says one word, but it is divisive--some hear Yanny and others Laurel. People who had been married for 50 years do not even hear the same word. How is it that we hear different things? It's been revealed that it is a matter of sound frequency, but this phenomenon took off on the internet.¹ Different things go viral on the internet all the time.

This week, what's gone viral is a little different. Vanity Fair, in an article released Tuesday, reported: “Jesus has gone viral.”² This was in response to the attention given to Bishop Curry's Royal Wedding sermon. After appearing on multiple news programs and most people's social media news feeds they could—they, meaning Vanity Fair, could say Jesus has gone viral.

While this statement, and the star status of our most senior bishop in the Episcopal Church, is charming and encouraging for us within the church, it brings with it a challenge to those of us who ascribe to what he preaches—that is love and Jesus. While those two words made it all over Twitter this week, we are a faith not just of words spoken but about the life behind them. Our lives must reflect the One we follow.

Last Sunday, Pentecost, we marked the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus ascends, and we are left, no longer with the real person of Christ, but with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that moved from the beginning of Genesis over the water drives the church today—I would certainly say it is the Holy Spirit who is moving now as “Jesus goes viral” and this is what Bishop Curry says about his captivating sermon as well.

Last Sunday, in our church year, we recognize the Holy Spirit and this Sunday, today, we celebrate Trinity Sunday, praising God as Trinity.

¹ Many news sources that reported on the Yanny and Laurel phenomenon. See, as an example, the New York Times article by Maya Salam and Daniel Victor's: “Yanny or Laurel? How a sound clip divided America” May 15, 2018. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/15/science/yanny-laurel.html>>

² Vanity Fair, “Most Reverend Michael Bruce Curry, the Breakout Star of the Royal Wedding Continues to Grace the Airwaves.” May 22, 2018. <<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/05/most-reverend-michael-bruce-curry-royal-wedding-today-show-the-view>>

The Trinity is a doctrine of the church with biblical roots that has developed over the centuries, but one that has been wrought with controversy and misunderstanding. God as three distinct persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—but these three distinct persons of God are, somehow perfectly and indivisibly One God.

Theologians have tried for centuries to clarify this—how exactly God is three and one all at once. However, some scholars say this is a reduction, an adaptation of what this doctrine is really about. Late Trinitarian scholar Catherine LaCugna thinks we have gotten lost in God’s inner life, rather than what the Trinity is meant to illumine: the Trinity is, she writes, a “statement about the reign of God and the rule of God’s household.”³ Yet, over centuries, it has been tamed by people. Jesus preached this message, Jesus spread it, but the Good News of God’s reign has eroded overtime as it was integrated into Greco-Roman culture. Being so distracted by the concept, we have often lost track of the meaning of the Trinity. The concept is three persons in one but the meaning is much simpler to understand. It is, however, much more difficult to follow in how we live our lives.

God as Trinity highlights God’s nature as one of relationship. God the Father is in total and perfect loving relationship with God the Son and the same goes with God the Holy Spirit and vice versa. There is nothing that Jesus does that is not also with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. None are more, none are less. All three persons, are in perfect communion—they are equal—in one another and of one another and yet in some way distinct.

A trinitarian God exemplifies love because by its nature it means God is in relationship—God is made up of three persons! And as we are made in God’s image, it shows us what we, not just you or I as an individual but what we as a whole are meant for: to be in loving relationship. God as Trinity shows us what those relationships are meant to be like.

La Cugna, in what I think is the thesis of her extensive and thorough work on the Trinity, *God For Us*, writes, “The [Trinity] emerges as the basis for mutuality among persons: rather than the sexist theory of complementarity, or the racist theology of superiority, or the clerical theology of privilege, or the political theology of exploitation, or the patriarchal theology of male dominance and control, the reign of God promises the life of true communion among all human beings and all creatures. Mutuality rooted in communion among persons is a non-negotiable truth

³ LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God For Us*. New York: Harper One, 1973.

about our existence, the highest value and ideal of the Christian life, because for God mutual love among persons is supreme.”⁴

All these views listed here have been held over the centuries that have shaped our understanding of the Trinity but she draws us back to the mutuality, the equality of these relationships.

This is not just one theologian’s perspective.

The first action taken by Bishop Curry following his television circuit was a vigil with a group of church elders from different denominations: Baptist, Reformed, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, AME, and Episcopal The vigil was called “Reclaiming Jesus”. In their statement, issued long before the Royal Wedding, they say:

WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED for the soul of our nation, but also for our churches and the integrity of our faith. The present [time] calls us to go deeper—deeper into our relationship to God; deeper into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; deeper into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk.

The church is always subject to temptations to power, to cultural conformity, and to racial, class, and gender divides, but we are called in Galatians to be “in Christ,” and to “not be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1-2)...”

The best response to our political, material, cultural, racial, or national idolatries is the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Jesus summarizes this as the Greatest Commandment--to love God and neighbor]: —(Matthew 22:38).—As to loving our neighbors, we would add “no exceptions.”

Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God he announced, is the Christian’s first loyalty, above all others. We pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).⁵

⁴ LaCugna, 399.

⁵ Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis. <http://www.reclaimingjesus.org/>

That is from their statement and according to the Trinity, heaven is a communion of persons.

Our God challenges us in how we live. And how we live is not simply about our personal piety, but how we live in relationship with others—how we are trying to bring about God’s kingdom. And we fall short of this all the time, but if we are working for God’s kingdom, grace is abundant so we need not fear falling short at all.

“Jesus has gone viral.” This is awesome but it does not make a difference if we and the world aren’t changed because of it. If the nature of Jesus those church elders are trying to reclaim, and as the nature of God as Trinity is loving relationship then we have no justification for hate. The challenge and the purpose of the church is to build relationships for the building of God’s kingdom. And this is not something we let come and go until the next big thing comes along. We say in morning and evening prayer: The God who was and is and is to come. Jesus has been around a long time. we just keep trying to follow.

Bishop Curry often says, “if you’re breathing God is calling.”⁶ How is God calling us to love? How is God calling us to build God’s kingdom with all people? You, me all of us are in this together—God made us that way. I pray the kingdom we are trying to build is something that looks like God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—being in loving relationship—not just talked about but lived out in our lives.

⁶ “Top Ten Things You Might Hear in a Bishop Curry Sermon.” Diocese of Fort Worth.
<https://episcopaldiocesefortworth.org/top-ten-things-you-might-hear-in-a-michael-curry-sermon/>
(This is #6)