

David: Well, here we are on this farewell Sunday, a day in which among other things we are recognizing the service of our intern pastor, Annie, this year. You probably know, that this year is part of Annie's training. She has been experiencing and practicing many new things in ministry at our church. And part of that whole process is an evaluation of her. So this might be a good day to wrap up some of that evaluating. Come on over here, Intern Pastor Annie. *(Annie comes over to join David behind the lectern. David begins working through a checklist.)* So, let's see what we've got here:

- Preaching—I think you've done a very good job at preaching and shown lots of improvement. Don't you folks all agree? OK. Passed.

- Worship Leadership – Also very good. Right? Passed.

Teaching – Let's see, you've done very well at church Bible studies as well as at the school where you're teaching. Passed.

- Oh, here's something I almost forgot. It says here you're supposed to be able to give a perfect definition and explanation for the Holy Trinity by the end of your internship. This seems like a good time for that, and it shouldn't be too hard. *(To the congregation)* You all understand this perfectly, right?

(to Annie) OK, well let's see how you do with this. What have you come up with?

Annie: Dancing

David: Come again?

Annie: The Holy Trinity is like dancing.

I got the idea from our Bible Study book,
but the idea originally comes from the Greek-speaking part of the early church.

Just like us, the first Christians searched for ways to explain
how God could be both three and one.

David: You're talking about perichoresis.

Annie: That's the Greek word for it ...

We should probably explain what it means.

David: I agree. Explain away.

Annie: Hmm, yes.

OK, so I think the easiest way to explain it

might be to demonstrate what perichoresis does *not* look like.

According to this concept, God is *not* like this. (*stands still*)

David: (*after watching a bit*) What are you doing?

Annie: A better question would be, ‘What am I *not* doing?’

David: OK, what are you not doing?

Annie: I’m glad you asked. I am NOT dancing.

David: That’s true, you’re NOT dancing.

Annie: And if I’m not dancing, what am I doing?

I’m standing still.

I’m not changing, not giving, not moving towards anyone else.

It’s as if I’m the center of my own universe,

expecting the universe to come to me.

David: OK. And if you’re saying that this is what God is not like, then you must also be saying that God is doing just the opposite: moving, reaching, giving, and dancing. So, are you going to demonstrate this dancing part for us too?

Annie: I think I’d rather just describe it.

Understanding God as a dance works like this.

The early Christians imagined the Holy Trinity

as the ultimate expression of community.

According to them Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

dance or flow around each other in continuous, mutual, self-giving love.

No person “takes the lead”—but all parts are in constant giving and rebalancing; always delighting in each other, always aware of and

in relationship with each other,

the way three dancers relate to each other in a complicated,

but beautiful, choreography.

David: Very well said. And I can see why you'd rather describe this beautiful dance than demonstrate it.

For one thing, we two aren't really the right number of people to demonstrate a dance of three.

Annie: Yeah, and I'm much better at demonstrating NOT dancing than dancing.

David: Same here. But I think we should say something about the implications of this beautiful triune concept of God, this dance of God's love. For instance, I think we should mention how this way of looking at God helps us to understand what it means when the Bible says: "God is love." The way I understand it, if God was only oneness, then until God created other beings there could be no love, since love is by definition something that one person has for another. But if God is triune, three-ness, then loving relationships are something that God has always been about.

Annie: That's right.

And this is an important thing for all of us to think about,

because it's something that people talk about a lot. (*addressing the people*)

Here's a question

for all of us, then:

how many times have you heard someone say 'God is love'?

What do you think they mean by that?

I think what they usually mean is that love is extremely important,

or that God wants us to love.

That's all true, but it doesn't go far enough.

In the Christian understanding, love is not just something you do.

Love is actually the very essence of what God is.

God has always been loving, even before we were created;

because the ultimate reality of God is a community of persons

who know and love one another.

David: Which is another reason why it makes sense to think of the Trinity as a dance of 3 persons in one God.

Annie: Yep. Because it's just not as much fun to dance alone.

David: You got it. Good job, Annie. You may be a 21st century congregational intern rather than an ancient Greek theologian, but that was still some pretty serious explaining of the Trinity. I would have to say that you definitely did not just dance around that subject. (*checking it off*) Passed.

Annie: Thank you.

David: But now I need to say something about why we really needed to talk about this today. It's actually not because I think you should be able to perfectly articulate the Holy Trinity at this point in your ministry, as fun as that is. I think this subject is important for us to talk about today because of the way it can speak to who we are, and who we are called to be. I believe one of the reasons why people shy away from difficult theological subjects is because these subjects seem so far removed from real life. But we need to understand that ideas like Trinity or perichoresis aren't concepts that theorize about some distant God. Instead they describe how this loving and relational God is close to us. And they describe not just God's reality, but ours.

Annie: I think I can say something about this.

What you're talking about brings up an extremely important part of the dance of the Trinity that we often fail to realize as Christians.

Namely, that when we get together each week, our worship and fellowship here are also to resemble a dance.

We too are to experience the ultimate delight

of pouring ourselves and our lives out in love toward God and each other, and receiving that same love, grace, and affirmation back from God

and from our Christian brothers and sisters.

We are also meant to know the liberation of being centered not on ourselves, but on the other.

We are to experience the dance of God in worship every week.

David: Dancing in church! What is the church coming to?

Annie: I think you know what I meant.

David: I do. And what you're saying is not just true for Sunday worship. (*to the congregation*) Think about this: God intends all of our life to become a dance of love and service. Meeting for Bible study, praying for

one another, caring for the weakest and neediest among us, taking care of the environment, loving not only our friends and family but also the stranger, praising and thanking God in daily life--these things are not just optional, occasional activities for the Christian. They are part of the dance of love that God calls us to enter into continually.

Annie: Exactly.

These are ways in which we can experience the choreography of self-giving love that God has always known.

These are ways that can help us break out of that self-centered, NOT-dancing mode, and enter into real relationships with each other and with our neighbors in need.

David: One more thing I think we can say about this before we close, something that relates to what is going on here in this church on this particular Sunday. Here we are gathered together on a day in which we will soon be saying goodbye to dear friends and fellow members of our congregation. This is actually the fifth Farewell Sunday I have lived through at this church. That's a lot of good byes. And this time it also includes me, which of course we'll be dealing with next week. And it includes you, Annie. Once again at our beloved Bratislava International Church we find ourselves saying goodbye to many dear friends. In this context I've often asked myself, how do we deal with so many partings? For me it's helpful to know that the dance doesn't end here. It's comforting to know that this wonderful choreography of fellowship in the church is not limited by geography; and it's not limited to any particular Christian congregation. Wherever we may be, whether here or on the other side of the globe, we're still bound together by the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If we belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ, we're still part of that dance.

Annie: And we can live out that dance wherever we may be,

by worshiping and serving God and others just as we have done here.

I know I will carry the dance I've experienced here

at Bratislava International Church with me my whole life;

the way the people of this church worship together, care for each other,
and reach out to those in need—it has been a model for me,
an invitation to enter the dance.

I am so grateful for that invitation,
the welcome and love you have shown for me and Sean.

You are a blessing to us,
a blessing to each other,
a blessing to the wider world ...

may God continue to bless you in your ministry, in your dance.

– *After that David can invite the congregation to participate in this dance of God’s love by lifting their voices in song –You Are Holy.*

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