

**Trinity Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Readings: Proverbs 8:1-11, 22-23, 30-31, Psalm 8, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17**

### **Introduction**

It is clear, obvious, palpable, never more so than in these times of Covid-19, that to be working class in America is an unenviable station in life, for there community is always perilous, vulnerable, assailable to the attacks of personal and collective and personal reversal. This is the message of the film “Manchester-by-the-Sea”, screened in 2017. The town is real, just some 40 minutes north of Boston, Massachusetts. What is so compelling about Manchester-by-the-Sea is its story: a story of sheer courage, the story of Lee, a man of all trades but master of none. Lee is a man who has been engulfed by grief: the grief of irregular and unreliable employment; the grief of the loss of his children through the burning of his home; the grief of the loss of his wife, who herself suffers depression, as result of the house fire; and the grief of the loss of his brother Joe, who to Lee’s surprise, entrusts to him, in his will, the custody of his grieving 16 year- old son Patrick. In this film, there appears noting redemptive. But, there is! What moves you, is Lee’s commitment to his community, his emotional and practical undertaking to his people. In the final scene, Lee, pursued by “the black-dog”, chased by his grief, hands custody to his close friend George and George’s wife, as he returns to Boston to find work; but still, still resolutely committed to Patrick, committed to find an apartment where they might ultimately live together.

What flows over me in this story is Lee’s rigorous self-giving, and more broadly, what I experienced pastoring in towns like it on the north-east coast of the US: the self-giving of people, just like Lee, to their communities. *There was something dignified, ultimately divine about it.*

### **Trinity**

What has Trinity got to do with this? Well actually a lot! The idea of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God as three in one and one in three: is not just about the way God has revealed himself to us. It is also about how God *relates to himself, how God operates within himself, how God co-exists between themselves*. What stands out in Christian teaching about the Trinity is something that surprises people: *that God is first and foremost community*. What we conclude from this idea, is this: that community – for Christians at least – is a divine thing, a sacred thing, a mystical thing, while in the same breath a tangible, concrete, practical thing. Community is the most precious of things: to be protected, encouraged, promoted, *because that is what God is: God is the first community*.

*But a question: how should we think about community? What are the marks, the characteristics of community when seen through the lens of the Trinity?* There are a number, but let’s refer to just one today: the idea of *mutuality*. Mutuality means what it sounds like: it refers to a close reciprocal interconnection, a give and take, where everyone benefits. But there is something else as well: not only does mutuality ensure mutual benefit, but it also means that we as individuals, *become more* than we would otherwise be if we were alone: *the other makes us more*. Using our imagination, we could say that mutuality is a sort of dance, a coordinated, choreographed dance, where we don’t just play our respective parts in our own interests, but where we work and play together. Now, this is precisely how theology speaks of the Trinity. The word used in classical scholarship to explain the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is *perichoresis*, which alludes to dancing together, to each person of the Trinity becoming more together than they would be apart, becoming more together, where they work and laugh together.

And to conclude: within this blueprint of mutuality, buried deep in the theology of the Trinity, there lies a sharp criticism of how we operate today. Today, we often speak of the need to tolerate each other: that is the *sine qua non*, the indispensable condition of modern democracy. *But it actually sells democracy short*. What makes democracy work, is that we recognize in the other, *not just someone to tolerate*, but someone who makes us more, than we are alone. Until we rediscover that truth, modern democracies will always be wanting and never more so than today: captured as we are, by the idea that we are sufficient to ourselves, or that others are either a means to our ends, or just threat.

What is so beautiful in Manchester-by-the-Sea, is the intense mutuality between the people. In their suffering struggle, which is working class America, there lies the tale of community: the fruit of the Trinity.