



Sermon, June 25, 2017
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Forming Disciples: Connecting with God

John 16:12-15;

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Bishop Woodie White began his now-famous sermon at the General Conference that voted upon the 1986 United Methodist Hymnal with the following words:

In 1955 when Lerner and Loewe penned "My Fair Lady," I am sure they had no idea that it would become one of the most famous musicals of all time. You might recall it was an adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion." It was set in 1912 London. Professor Higgins finds an urchin girl, Eliza, and tries to make her over into a sophisticated woman to become a part of London society. He does so to his amazement and hers. He produces a beautiful, sophisticated, cultured woman. There is one unforgettable scene when, having achieved what they had sought, she is introduced to London society. She learns how to speak with proper diction; how to carry herself in a way that causes heads to turn. Having

succeeded, they decide to dance together. Afterwards, she is still on cloud nine. Late in the evening when she is about to go to bed, the maid comes in. She is still excited and begins to sing a memorable song. The words are these:

*I could have danced all night,
I could have danced all night,
And still have begged for more.
I could have spread my wings,
And done a thousand things,
I'd never done before.
I'll never know what made it so exciting,
Why all at once my heart took flight,
I only know when he
Began to dance with me,
I could have danced, danced, danced
All night.*

Dancing. What is it about this rhythmic movement of body that causes one to sway, to come close to self and to God? In its biblical context, dancing was originally not done for its own sake. Dancing was an act of gratitude and thanksgiving. It was what one did to express faith and thanksgiving to God. It was a part of festival and feast. It had an important place in worship because words seemed inadequate. Somehow the grateful spirit had to express itself in body, motion, and movement. So, people danced. David danced. People danced in worship. They danced and danced and danced. (from Woodie White, "I Could Have Danced All Night," found online at <http://www.30goodminutes.com/index.php/support-us/23-member-archives/526-woodie-white-program-3317>]

Do you like dancing? I used to enjoy dancing in Junior High. You remember Junior High dances? The lights were down low, maybe a mirror ball flinging stars around the room. A band or DJ would be up front, probably on stage. And then everyone would be pasted to the walls – girls on one side, boys on the other, nervously looking across the yawning void of the gym floor. Occasionally, now and then, someone would work up the courage to ask someone else to dance. I was one of

those. Girls liked the fact that I would dance. I was never one of the people pasted to the walls.

In graduate school, I took some classes in ballet and modern dance. One of my favorite dance forms is called Contact Improvisation – no choreography, just movement and contact with your partner.

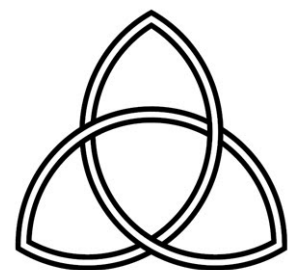
Dancing. We humans love it all over the world.

Two Sundays ago, we observed Trinity Sunday, and you might remember that I talked about an interesting connection between the Trinity and dancing. In the early Fourth Century, there was a lot of discussion about the relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Were they one Being, or three separate Beings? The solution that developed was that they shared one Essence – divinity (they were One Godhead) but that Divinity was manifested in or proceeded forth into the world in three forms or “faces” shown to the universe. The wording they chose to describe this was very specific. In describing how the one Godhead manifested in 3 manners of self-disclosure, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they chose a term from the theatre of their time. In the theatre of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the actors wore masks to reveal to the audience who they were playing. In Greek those masks were called *prosopon*, and in Latin, *personae*. So, in Greek, God was one Divinity in three *prosopa*, in Latin, one God in three *personae*. The doctrine of the Trinity basically stated that God shows God’s self to us in three forms of self-revelation - through the masks, as it were, of the Father, or of the Son, or of the Holy Spirit.

But a question also presented itself: what was the relationship between these three *Personae*? Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea, the Cappadocian fathers,

described these self-manifestations of Deity as engaging in an eternal dance, *perichoresis*. I like to imagine it as three *personae* in a constant contact improv. A Dynamic, ever-changing, ever-creating relationship. Do you recall the symbol of the Trinity

that was in the bulletin? Trace it out in the air with me. This is a symbol of



the *perichoresis*, of the flow from one persona to the next, from Father to Son to Holy Spirit.

You know, as human beings, there is an element of mystery to each of us. We don't fully know who the other person is. We remain mysteries to one another until we reveal something of ourselves to one another. That is our *persona*, the mask of our self-revelation. We are known as persons through our relationships.

In Africa, there is a philosophy of human relationships called Ubuntu. It embodies the idea that we become persons through our relationships. "People become people through people." Jesus expresses this in his summation of the law in two commandments. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We are formed through our relationships. We are who we are because of our interactions with one another, with what we reveal of ourselves to one another, and how we reveal that. God does the same with us. The *perichoresis* of the Trinity is a dance of love, and God invites us to that dance.

God forms us by being in relationship with us. This is the first part of forming disciples of Jesus Christ: Connecting with God. We gather in worship, in prayer and study in order to connect with God. But it is not a static relationship. It is a dance like contact improv or a waltz or square dancing - ever moving, ever-flowing.

This place, church, is like a grand ballroom, and God, who is the Dance Itself, is inviting us to dance. But just like on that Junior High dance floor, we miss out on the fun, on the joy of life if we paste ourselves to the wall. We might not know all the steps, but God says, that's okay, just follow me. I'll lead." And if we let him do that, we find that, like Eliza, we can dance, dance, dance, all night.