

Without the Together, there is no Trinity
Sermon by Rev. Dr. Anne Miner-Pearson
Consecration Sunday, October 31, 2021

Poverty Point covers 345 acres in northeastern Louisiana and is the name for a number of earthen mounds. From the surrounding land, it's clear that the humps of dirt weren't created by any natural geological force. The mounds form a semi-circle of numinous ridges set in a particular pattern. It turns out that these mounds were created by human beings, human beings who lived in the area between 1800 and 1350 BCE. That's a very long time ago. And, even more amazing, is how archaeologists believe the mounds came to be. They were formed by the hauling of "8 million basket loads of dirt, each weighing 55 pounds". In "people-power", that's a lot of hauling and a lot of time.

But wait. The story gets even more interesting after looking at the core of Mound A. Mound A is even circular levels of alternating types of dirt. One layer is reddish soil and the next one is grayish soil - all the way from the base to the top, the height of a 7-story building.

But wait. There's another curious fact about this ancient UNESCO site. Each different layer of different soil is distinct from the one on the top and the one on the bottom. None of the red soil ever mixes with the gray, even at the molecular level. The only explanation is when each layer was hauled into place and packed down, it didn't rain until the different soil was packed over it. So, given weather in Louisiana, those ancient ancestors were working pretty fast and had to be a cooperative team. Archaeologists figure Mound A was built in less than 3 months - between 2 rains. That's a lot of cooperation.

I learned this incredible story in Peter Turchin's book, *UltraSociety*. Turchin studies cultural evolution and when he visited Chartres Cathedral, he became struck by the size and scale of such a beautiful and ingenious structure, a kind of religious epiphany for him.

So, using his cultural evolutionary brain, he started puzzling how human beings evolved to having a brain able to conceive of such a huge building, and also evolve to have the brain and will to cooperate with enough people over time to actually build it — at the same time, people are engaging in endless violence against one another. Turchin wondered if what humans learned through ever-increasingly complex war strategies is what enabled those same ancestors to create dirt mounds in Louisiana and cathedrals in France. And finally in our life-time, join with Russia and other nations around the world to put the International Space Station into orbit around the earth.

All the examples point to an increasing ability to cooperate and Turchin posits that we humans are late coming to cooperation. Before us, ants, wasps and bees were the only examples. Then, starting 10,000 years ago, there is evidence our evolving brains were able to imagine that working together had some pretty cool advantages. One hunter could kill one rabbit for one dinner. However, a group of cooperating hunters could kill an elephant and fed themselves for months. Then, a novel idea

And here we are this morning. It's Consecration Sunday celebrating the present phase in pledging money for our collective ministries. We're not really that much different than those mound-builders in Louisiana, Chartres stone masons, or scientists who worked on the International Space Station. We are here this morning to celebrate "Trinity is Stronger Together".

While the number of pledges and the amount of financial resources available for Trinity's ministries are enormously critical, I'd like to hold up a deeper reality. Beneath the figures and names on each separate pledge card or entry of online giving, we are witness to an amazing human phenomenon: cooperation. We are attesting to the truth that, by coming together, we are able to do and be amazing creatures on this earth.

Along with Peter Turchin's examples, he also points out the sacrifice and cost of cooperation. Whether a group of people are going to war or erecting a cathedral, everyone needs to be in. In cooperative ventures, the "catch-22" is that, while it's costly and a sacrifice for all, if there's only one person bearing the total cost and making the total sacrifice, the endeavor becomes impossibly costly. In other words, what we are celebrating today could not possibly be celebrated at all unless we're all in this together. Truly, Trinity is stronger *because* of the *together*. That stewardship theme can't be true any other way. Without the *together*, there is no Trinity.

Without the *together*, there is no Trinity. I'm not repeating those last words as a clever preaching technique. I'm saying them again because "without the *together*, there is no Trinity" is also a central theological and spiritual truth. The truth of Trinity is how we most profoundly experience God as Christians. It is tucked into other moments of our gatherings - in the name of Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. Our liturgies start and end with that faith proclamation.

As followers of Jesus, we are on a life journey in the trinitarian flow of God's continuous and abundant love. This belief and trust draws any thought or experience of cooperation down into our core, into the core life of God. Trinity shows us how love, light and life moves - from empty to full and then around again. While we speak of three experience of God, the energy, the power, the potential is in the movement between.

Jesus points to this in his answer to the scribe's question in this morning's gospel. "'Which commandment is 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.'" In Jesus' answer is gathered up the flow of love between heart, soul, and body. In Jesus' answer is gathered up the flow of love between neighbor and self. In Jesus' answer is gathered up the flow of love in the Trinity, the flow of energy and love which brings us nearer to the kingdom of God, a fuller presence of God, in our lives, right now, right here.

And in the Trinitarian movement of love, there is no separate act. As in the ancient premise of alchemy, combining base metals has the potential to create silver and gold. So, all our individual pledges, in God's economy and by God's Spirit, are transformed and made precious. As we let go, in an act of emptying, our fullness reaches into every corner of this building and, equally, beyond these walls. Our letting go and sacrifice brings, in some way, God's reign nearer and more visible. God's and our generosity becomes healing, hope, justice and compassion. Amen.