

[SLIDE] Real World – Trinity Sunday, June 7th, 2020 – FINAL DRAFT

Do you know that ‘real world’ story? “Wait, just wait until you have to enter the ‘real world.’” In my youth, I hated hearing that phrase. I was not afraid of what was to come, but I felt that the people saying this to me didn’t know me. They were telling me that perhaps I would fall apart when I found out what the ‘real world’ was like. Part of my youthful rebellion was to push against that.

So, when I was in my late teens to early ’20s, I wanted life experiences. I wanted to see life in all it’s circumstances: beginning, ending, rich, poor, young, old. It was all some new territory that I felt called into, and the medical world was where I was going to pursue these experiences. I entered the field of nursing.

As a nurse, I worked in hospitals for 5-6 years but yearned for more. **[Inner City Slide]** Soon I found myself as a home care nurse in the inner city, on Cleveland’s east side. I knocked on doors in neighborhoods like Hough, where the national guard came to put down the riots of the mid-1960s. I went into the projects and inner-city high rises. I wanted to challenge my experience of the world – and I did.

An early experience for me felt like I was the minority. I was the only white man on the street, in the lobby, on the elevator, or in the home. I immediately discovered that I was welcome. The generosity and hospitality moved me in the homes of people who certainly had less than I had. In the culture where I had grown up, I was told that the inner city was a dangerous place. Indeed, there are places and times of the day that are less safe than others,

and the patients in the community helped me to sort that out. One patient simply said, “don’t come when it is dark out.”

But these people living in poverty were different than I had imagined. My culture taught me to fear and be suspicious of them. I found the opposite to be true. But I had to discover that for myself, and it happened when I engaged in relationships with them.

I met people who loved each other. They talked about Jesus, their pastor, and the power of prayer. They cared for their loved ones better than the finest nursing homes that I have ever set foot in. For instance, I remember I walked up to the third-floor room of an inner-city home. The hallway was dark, the steps creaked, and sometimes ‘things moved.’ When I entered the room, I found a 90 some year-old woman who was bed-bound and could not speak. Her room was well lit. She was well-nourished, a space heater made the room comfortably warm for her, but I had to take off my coat because I was roasting. She was cared for and loved.

[hospitality slide] In the inner city, I was offered food, conversation, and hospitality. It changed me. I felt like I had been misled in my white culture. Furthermore, I knew about the Holy Spirit. I understand that the reign of God is not limited to race, religion, countries, or particular neighborhoods. This experience changed my perceptions of the poor and vulnerable. I saw how our culture wants to categorize and make generalizations about those who are different than us.

On occasion, when I told patients where I lived in the suburbs, a cultural divide became apparent that I was not aware of. On more than one occasion, I was told, “Mark, you won’t see me around your neighborhood, but you are always welcome here!” There were other stories

that patients had of unwelcome encounters in areas that I lived when they had ventured into the suburbs. I felt sad because I knew what they were talking about: Racism was part of their 'real world' experience.

That was my reality check. That all I see and hear in MY cultural context is NOT the truth. The truth comes when we are in relationship with the other.

Remember, when I spoke about my chaplaincy training? I spoke of God being there, in the space between each other. God comes to us in the neighbor. When I did home care in the inner city or worked in the Emergency Departments – it opened my eyes. I saw God! I saw a welcoming God who loved without boundaries. This was and still is exciting stuff because I got to see God at work in all kinds of places and doing all kinds of things.

Today is Trinitarian Sunday [**slide – Trinitarian Sunday**]- We give praise to our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I want to point out something that we forget. We tend to think of the 'poles' of the Trinity. Like "what is God the Father doing now? God the Son? God the Holy Spirit?" Instead, think of these as three identities of our one God and to pay attention to the relationship between them. It is that relationship of love and life that we are invited into.

A relationship where God lives with God's people. [**SLIDE-God lives with God's people**]. God lives with all people and not just you and me this Sunday morning. God desires to be in relationship with all nations, all races, and all colors of people. [**SLIDE – God**] We read of God in the Old Testament – God hears the cries of his people and sends Moses to free them. God speaks to Israel through the prophets, and King David is warned of God's displeasure with him in his handling of Bathsheba and her husband, Uria. We recite, "Who has spoken through the

prophets". **[SLIDE – Spirit of God]**. We read about the Spirit of God that moves over the waters in creation. The wind or breath of God – Ruah – that we read about in the Old Testament that comes to God's people and steps into the life of Israel. We understand the Holy Spirit in the New Testament coming to believers in Acts and remaining with us.

[SLIDE – Jesus]. Jesus – fully divine and fully human. Present with us. Who died and was raised from the dead so that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can separate us from God's unrelenting desire to be present with us – and in our lives today.

Robert Jensen sums it up this way, **[SLIDE “the whole doctrine of the Trinity can be explained by simply remarking that Christians pray to the Father, with the Son, in the Spirit, and are convinced that by doing so they are properly caught up in the story that God lives with his people.” Robert Jensen]** (p.51)

God lives with us. Know that our understanding of the Trinity came from human experience. It came from lived encounters with the God who shows up for the sake of all humanity. For ALL human bodies, no matter what their color, gender, or race. Our relationship together is where we encounter God in each other. To reject any one of these people is to reject God. After all, God is found in the neighbor.

When people want to tell me about how I am 'mistaken' in my views of the poor, they are often standing on the sidelines. They haven't walked in the home of a fellow brother or sister.

That's what our God calls us to do, to be in relationship with each other and to see each other. **[Slide of someone looking at another with compassion]**. It is moving to hear of peaceful protests where the police take a knee, and the crowds protesting chants change to

praise. In that moment, of taking a knee, the police are saying, “We see you! We hear you.”

Unprecedented! Amazing! The power and presence of God is displayed when we see others.

When we see each other, I mean look, listen, and feel with our hearts, then we open our hearts to the presence of God in each other. We are saying that God is here with us, and it changes us. God is in our midst, and we share in that hospitality- that same hospitality that was shared with me in the hundreds of inner-city homes that I entered.

Jesus Christ came into the world, as one being with God the father. There were moments of hospitality offered to Jesus, until one day, he found himself suffering, dying on a cross. The most brutal and visible form of death the ruling powers had to offer. **[SLIDE of Christ on the cross]**. We are stunned by the inhumanity, as Jesus cries out in agony, and the last breath of life is taken from him.

We might not relate much to that moment, but for centuries, black people do. African Americans have identified with Christ on the cross and how Jesus’ life was unfairly taken from him, when they see the lynching of black people. If you want to read more on this, read James Cone – The Cross and the Lynching Tree. As one of my black seminarian colleagues said just yesterday, “Black people identify not just with Jesus suffering, but with the pain that he endured.”

[SLIDE – of someone standing at the foot of the cross]. We listen to the crucifixion story year after year in our churches, and wonder what we would have done, there at the foot of the cross. I propose that every day we are standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus. That is the real world we are standing in right now. A world where our black brothers and sisters are hurting, and look to the cross for a God who knows their pain.

Our Trinitarian God was there – on that cross. On the day that the world wanted to discard a body. A body that threatened the establishment with solidarity, with unity. With love for all of humanity, the privilege and power of God were surrendered there on the cross. The message of God is to come and to follow.

The Trinity invites us into a relationship with God through each other. In the Trinity, God says, “I hear you, I see you, and I am with you!” **[SLIDE Matthew 28:20 “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”]**. That’s the real world we are called to live into, to hear, see, and to be present with each other. We are called to use our authority to give voice to those who are silenced. The cross challenges us to surrender our privilege and power in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To see others and as God sees all of humanity; as bodies as created and loved by God.

AMEN!