

Trinity Sunday
Baptism of Kathy Peacock

Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

[John 3:16-18]

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The fiery pillar materialises *ex nihilo*, and speaks, to Charlton Heston in Cecil DeMille's 1956 biblical epic *The Ten Commandments*.

I am, I am, I am the Lord Thy God, names the voice before a prehensile stream of Oscar-winning special effects emerges from the pillar and etches into the mountainside some Bronze Age Phoenician Hebrew far beyond my palaeographical powers. And then the familiar slabs—those rectangles with rounded tops—are carved by the same supernatural flame, and Heston's Moses reaches for them, and holds them in his own hands.

These are not the plates he now holds, of course. They lie crumbled at the bottom of Mt Sinai; God's own work

and writing smashed in the old prophet's fury at his people's faithless idolatry. His wrath burned hot and burned the golden calf and ground it into dust, and the people drank the dust mixed with water, and so the idol is transmuted into effluent waste.

Moses had to supply the slabs this second time around. But the Lord came again and stood with him, comes in the midst of us and takes us as an inheritance and utters that mystery of a name, a name that may or may not come from the verb *to be*, but has been received anyway as an indication that God just *is*. *I am, I am*, says the Lord. There is no *why* or *how* to the existence of God. There is, in other words, no purpose, no function, no *point* to God. God is in this way like number theory and the ballet, like poetry and musical theatre, none of which need to be *useful* to be essential. God is a gratuitous act, and therefore utterly free, free from our obsessions with utility and value, costs and benefits, and therefore free to love for no reason at all.

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And so, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is most commonly and disastrously misunderstood in *functional* terms: the

Father is for creating, the Son for redeeming, and the Spirit for sanctifying. God is thus defined in terms of what God does for us, which is almost laughably narcissistic, if not tragically idolatrous. The problem with modern idols—made of ideas rather than of gold—is that they cannot be so easily identified and expelled.

It is not our fault, of course. From all fronts, we are assaulted with our own objectification and commodification. Human *beings* have become human *resources*, to be evaluated based on our outputs and efficiencies. Cries of need are met at best with unfeeling mantras about balanced budgets and at worst with mocking talk of magical money trees. We are now perhaps known best by the mindless algorithms that extract data from our most popular avenues of self-expression; this data is then sold to the highest bidder, and thus we have become the products of the services we purport to use. It is no wonder that we don't know how to be loved, that we are in perpetual states of anxiety about whether we belong, whether we are worthy so to do.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is the idea that at the heart of all things

is a life that consists of nothing other than gratuitous love. Father, Son, and Spirit pour themselves out into one another without remain, holding nothing of themselves back for themselves: they therefore define one another, not by roles fulfilled but by love given and received, given and received, given and received, ever world without end.

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This then, is the name into which you, Kathy, are to be baptised, really the same name revealed to Moses so many mythic years ago.

This is the *life* into which you are to be baptised, a life of learning to be loved not for what you can produce or accomplish or what you look or sound like, but just *because*; because you were made by love for love.

Our job—the job of this congregation now gathered and of the Church throughout the world—is to help you with this learning, by loving you. Your baptism calls forth ours, in which we too were brought into this new life. And we are unspeakably privileged, from now on, to call you our own. Take seriously the promises we are making to you, Kathy: This will forever be your

Church, and we will forever be your people. It will not matter how far away you go—though London is really not very far away—this will always be a home to which you can return. We will always have your back.

Your job is, like ours, to live out this calling to *be* in the world unencumbered by the trappings of life as it is typically known, the petty insecurities that fuel our narcissistic compulsions to assert ourselves, even to the detriment of others. This is, of course, the sense in which baptism is a kind of death: you will be drowned in the waters of baptism into the death of Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for the sake of the world. The life into which you then emerge is the life of his resurrection, which walks with strangers and breaks the barriers of fear and sits at table to truly know and be known.

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These are all glorious mysteries.

God the Father; God the Son; God the Holy Spirit.

The baptism by water and the name of God.

And you.

Amen.