Sermon on Trinity Sunday 2017
(Genesis 1:1-2:4a; 2 Cor 13:11-13; Matt 28:16-20)

"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."
―Rudyard Kipling

Especially in our time we might question the “of course” in that claim! We’ve got the contrary sayings: “actions speak louder than words” or the “Christianized version” attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary use words,”

In addition we live in a world flooded with social media images and the words we’re exposed to seem increasingly weak: mere information or, worse, fake news, blather and blither;

It’s getting harder and harder to take words seriously and yet, despite the common wisdom about actions and words I would say that what Kipling says is certainly true!

But of course I’m a preacher! I’m in a tradition that believes in the primacy of the Word, “and God posted on Instagram and then made a Youtube video; no, God *said,* ‘let there be light and there was light!”

Words are the most powerful stimulant and intoxicant used by humankind, for words are truly the seed of actions; they’ve built up and torn down empires.

“Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth. See today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms…to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

God’s famous words to Jeremiah when he calls him as a young man to be a prophet.

To bring it back to us; words persuade us to do things we know to be unwise and to make sacrifices that we initially cower at but now feel compelled to make.

They win our hearts or disgust our souls. Indeed what makes us come up with sayings like “actions speak louder than words” is our deep sense that words and actions should be linked; nothing brings us more joy than words that match action and nothing speaks of a cynical mood like words met with *in*appropriate actions.

Many words are “before the fact words,” words that inspire and motivate, words like “go for it!” “Challenge” or “possibility.”

But there are also powerful “after the fact words,” words that describe a result; “after the fact words” are not a fait accompli but words that help us take stock of what has just happened, words that are meant to be markers on the ongoing discovery, words like “victory,” “disappointment,” or “accomplishment.” One such word is Trinity.

Trinity was a word coined around 200 C.E. by the Church Father Tertullian in a pastoral letter to an inquirer who was wondering about the character of God.

The word “Trinity” is not a word used in the New Testament, but an after the fact word used by teachers and bishops of the early church to describe a milepost, a marker on the journey of discernment into the Mystery of God

It’s a word that has within it both the power and the delusionary aspects of language that so inspire us or tempt us towards cynicism.

The word Trinity has come, in many people’s minds, to signify abstraction and confusion. How can 3 be 1; how can 1 be three; three persons, one God, how dumb is that! Which can, easily, lead to, “religion is stupid!”

But when it was first used, it was a concrete results words an “aha” word that helped people mark what had been happening.

It helped people draw a tentative picture of the life of Christ from his birth (what we celebrate with the beginning of our Church Year in Advent and Christmas) through his life, death, Resurrection, Ascension and culminating in Pentecost; what we celebrated last week.

Which is, by the way, why Trinity Sunday stands as an immediate appendix to this chronology that finishes on Pentecost; an explanatory “afterword” which you sometimes find at the end of a book.

Trinity was a word that was not meant to be arcane and strange, but concrete and hopeful. “This is the shape of God’s life and character; therefore we can anticipate thus and so for our own participation in God’s Being and Mission.”

That’s the kind of thing people were thinking when the word was first coined.

So let’s flesh this out a bit; using Jesus’ life as a key to understanding both the First and New Testaments, people who experienced and then wrote about the God revealed in Jesus began to notice hints throughout the scriptures about the way God operates, about the way God’s love gives birth to Creation, Rescues Creation and then Draws Creation and her creatures, especially humans, into God’s very heart and purpose.

For instance, just to go back to the beginning for a moment, people noticed that God is there, simply there at the beginning: “in the beginning God” and that God’s breath or Spirit appears to be on the scene as it were and that this incubating, brooding breath is activated by things God “says.” A kind of three-fold reality, if you like.

In the rest of the First Testament and then especially in Jesus’ life, Christians have noted this threefoldness: God’s intention becoming so real, so tangible so close that it almost can’t help becoming human! And this process, must itself be the result of loving presence, the Spirit.

Threefoldness is no mere idea but a way to talk about the love of God come close, become real in an ongoing and powerful way.

We could say this in so many ways, but again, Trinity Sunday is only a beautiful feast if it describes or at least calls us not towards the only way to speak about God but towards a marker on our common journey into the infinite Mystery of the One God

As the great Anglican theologian John Macquarrie said about 50 years ago; the triune nature of God can be articulated as primordial being: that which is and explains why there is anything at all; as expressive being: why things are particular in the way they are, including all creatures on earth; including, as the prime icon of all this: the *totus Christi,* the total Christ: Jesus Christ + the New Community drawn from all ages, all tribes, all socio-economic realities

And unitive being: God present in and through all things and wooing all into union with the divine life!

Our gospel wants to say that when we share the good news with each other and others what we’re really inviting them into is an immersion into, a life of following this threefold movement of God’s love.

Baptizing people into the threefold movement or energy of the One God is something from our Gospel that we literally enact at each baptism; we say those exact words!

Making disciples of Jesus, the one primary command Jesus gives to his followers in this text is a “making” of this kind of grace and breadth;

it’s not an invitation into certainty or rigidness, of one denomination having all the goods and other denominations and religions having nothing to say; it truly is an “immersive, lifelong experience,” which is one of the reasons our adopted vision statement says that we are community in which we are helping each other explore God’s Beauty, Truth and Goodness.

We’ve not arrived, but we’re on the way; and as we’re on the way we give witness to each other of God with nods to the language of those who’ve come before us.

Our second reading offers us a test case in our communal life. It’s another of those passages that Anglicans try to take as literally as possible. We greet each other, if not with a kiss of peace, then with a handshake of peace.

Our ordinary greeting to begin our Eucharist and to end our council or other meetings is called the Grace and it’s a straight-forward recital of the last verse of this reading!

What we want to say by these liturgical words and actions is: “please God, let our words match our actions!” If we’re not simply being hypocrites, than our common life must at some level reflect the very energies of God, the very way God brings Good News to us as Grace, Love, and enlivening fellowship/communion.

Jesus is our Archetype, our Leader into comprehending how the One God moves in this threefold way. That’s why I’ve selected something counterintuitive for Trinity Sunday for our affirmation of faith, the Shema, and not the Nicene Creed which, I think is more appropriate for Pentecost for reasons I touched on last week

At the end of our Gospel Jesus says that immersed in the Divine Reality we should teach each other to “obey everything that I have commanded you!” As we say Jesus’ version of the “Hear O Israel” we are confessing that we live most Trinitarian when we live through and into the Great Commandment

The reality of God’s love is so astounding, you and I are invited to share it with everyone! There are people around us, there are parts of our hearts that are estranged from this astounding beauty! What if we were to invite them with the Love we’re beginning to experience; what if today, we invite ourselves?

Words matter because Love matters! Come to think of it, Trinity is not just an after the fact word, it’s an invitation to Life, capital L!