

The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church  
May 5, 2002 (Communion Sunday)

## Remember

Edited transcript of Rev. Dr. Rachel Rivers' sermon

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 49:13-15; John 14:15-21

The heart of the Christian message is simple and yet, of course, profound. Perhaps most simply put, it's this: God is love, and this love loves each and every one of us. Our challenge as human beings on this Earth is to learn to receive God's love ever more fully and deeply and completely and to share this love with one another.

So why is something so simple so difficult to live? As I turned on the car radio earlier this week, the first thing I heard was that there had been four homicides in Oakland in the last 48 hours and that a fifth person had been shot and was in critical condition. This is just one blatant example of how we as a human race are not living out the simple, yet difficult task of receiving God's love and loving one another. The events of the Christian year are expressions of the Gospel message that God is Love. As we're approaching Pentecost and today's lectionary readings are about how God loves us and is with us, I thought it would be a good opportunity to talk about the Trinity.

The Trinity is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is a topic that Swedenborg discusses often in his 30 theological volumes, especially because it is so easy to misunderstand what the Trinity is all about. The main truth Swedenborg wants us to remember about the Trinity is that there is *one* God and that there are three aspects or ways of experiencing God. It is essential to remember that there is one God because there being one God means that ultimately we are one, ultimately all is one. Within the extraordinary diversity and richness of life, this planet and everywhere, there is ultimately unity.

There are many ways to approach the topic of the Trinity. Today I will talk about it in terms of *where God is*. Let's begin with the first aspect of the Trinity: where is God the Father? God the Father is *everywhere*! God the Father is eternal, infinite, and a little hard to put your finger on. I had an interesting experience in my scuba diving class which brought the everywhere-ness of God acutely to my attention. At a point well into my training, I found myself sitting with the rest of the class on the bottom of the ocean, about 18 feet below the surface, breathing through a regulator that is attached to a hose that is attached to a tank of air that is strapped to my back. Every now and then we had to take the regulator out of our mouth just to remind us where our air was coming from. It was so odd to have only one place to get air from—just one little regulator. It was a more uncomfortable experience than I thought it would be.

What went through my mind next will give you an idea of what your minister does when she's sitting on the bottom of the ocean: she thinks, "Wow, under water, the air I need to breathe is only here, in this scuba tank. That's not like God. God is everywhere, and God's love is everywhere. God is everywhere we go; God's not just in one place, in a very particular circumstance, where if we don't find God right then and there (like the regulator to my scuba tank) we die. God is everywhere!" And when I came up from the ocean floor, I was very happy for a long time just breathing wherever I wanted to! It was such an extraordinary gift to have air wherever I inhaled. God is everywhere.

God *is* everywhere, yet we human beings, while we are eternal beings, are also temporal beings living physical lives within the dimensions of time and space. Living lives, in the flesh, we have a very human need to find God here on earth. And so we have been given God the Son. Where is God the Son? God the Son is *among us*.

My diving certification training was prompted by my trip to the Yucatan in January where I was snorkeling in the cenotes. Cenotes, as you might know, are openings to underground rivers. The Mayans believed that one way to connect with the divine was to weigh down a princess with lots of heavy gold and jewels and to drop her into the deepest part of the cenote.. She never came back up, of course, being all weighed down and having no scuba gear on.

As present day Christians, a way that we seek to connect with the divine is by finding God among us. This is God incarnate. I invite you each to think for a few moments about your experiences of God incarnate-- experiences you have had with another person or other people where you felt *particularly* and *personally* loved, where you felt particularly known and recognized for who you are. Recall a time when you felt real love in a most precious and special way, when you felt beauty, peace, harmony, connection. Let those memories surface.....

.....This is something that we earth beings get to have—particular experiences of loving and being loved. It is very, very precious. These particular experiences, though, don't last forever. They are time-limited: they happen in precious moments, they can happen over precious years, but we move in and out of different states in this temporal world. One of the costs of having these temporal experiences of God incarnate is that we also at some time lose the experience of that particular connection, that particular manifestation of the Divine.

And this is where God the Holy Spirit enters into the picture. Where is God the Holy Spirit? God the Holy Spirit is *within us*.

The memories and experiences of connection with love in our lives are to be treasured. They are to be held as sacred within our being. It's like how we furnish our homes: what do we put around us? What memories and thoughts do we have there that are the touchstones that we come back to over and over, where we can rest, where we are refreshed and replenished? This is the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for Holy Spirit gets translated many different ways: Consoler, comforter, counselor, guide. It's that presence that reminds us of those memories, that helps us know what a dear soul we are, and that helps us to move forward and manifest God's love in our lives

I was visiting at the home of a woman who recently lost her husband of 60 years. Knowing that she and her husband had lived in this home together for several decades, looking around the room, I asked her, "Are you lonely in this house with your husband not here?" She said, "Rachel, everything in this house, he and I created together. The reason we were even here was because of who the two of us were together. Everything, everything is about him and me together. I'm not lonely in this house. He is here. He is here and everywhere."

God is here. God is here and everywhere. God is in this place, right this moment among us. And God is within us, in all the precious ways that we've been touched by Love. God invites us to fully receive this Love that God is, and to live in love with one another.

*Amen*