

“Overflowing”
Romans 5:1-5, John 16:12-15
May 22, 2016 Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

You'll notice that there are some extra people with us this morning. Last night we had a bunch of youth and adults spending the night in the Village Square as a exercise in awareness of homelessness and to raise supplies for the Food Pantry. They spent all night in cardboard boxes, a symbol of how a homeless person in our society might have to live. You've seen how much they raised in canned goods and non-perishable food items that will go into our pantry to feed the hungry and they are to be congratulated for all that effort, for all those items will go to feed someone who cannot buy food on their own. Thanks to all of you for all you help.

But how much really did they learn about being homeless? Let's be serious, they spent the night in a cardboard box, but they had nice sleeping bags and pads to cushion the ground. How many homeless people really have those? Not many. And they were spending the night in nice, safe Richland. How many true homeless people do we have living in the park on any given night? Right, none that I know of. And when they showed up here last night at 6:00 they were met by Meredith who let them find a nice sturdy box and gave them duct tape and a tarp if they needed it. And Dr. Murray Cooper was here to help with the engineering and construction phase of building their one-night shelters. I don't think the homeless in Kalamazoo or Grand Rapids have those advantages. Then after they were there in the park for a little while and they had started a fire, the Richland police showed up. That's something the homeless can relate to, but our police showed up bringing marshmallows and chocolate bars and graham crackers so the kids could make s'mores. Homeless folks probably don't have that happen all too often. A little while later, our friend Robin Nott came by with his guitar and led the kids in some singing and story-telling. Someone else had pizza delivered to them, Hardings provided the youth with bottled drinks in case they were thirsty. Not to be outdone, even McDonalds made a donation of apple slices and yoghurt.. All the while people were driving by, dropping off food, telling the kids what a

great thing they were doing. They were provided with plenty of firewood to keep them warm, flashlights in case they didn't bring one of their own, and the church bathrooms were open all night because we really didn't want them to be uncomfortable, do we? And they had Meredith and Rob and Kelsey staying up all night, watching over them, keeping them safe.

So how much did they really learn about what it is like to be homeless? Well, maybe they developed a little sympathy for those who are truly homeless, but do they know what it feels like to be homeless based on this one night in the Village Square? No, they really don't. This wasn't an experience of homelessness. But really it wasn't supposed to be. We didn't want the kids to go home feeling miserable because they had spent one night in the park. We want the kids, we want you to go home amazed at the overflowing of love that we can experience as the community of faith, as the people of God. We didn't really want the kids to experience *what is*, we want them to experience *what should be*.

This Sunday is Trinity Sunday. That might not mean a lot to you, but I love Trinity Sunday. I admit that some of the reason is the music. I love "Holy, Holy, Holy," and "Come Thou Almighty King," I think they are two of the great hymns of the church. But I also like Trinity Sunday because it tells us something about God. Now how many of you here understand the Trinity? How many of you understand how God can be three person but one God? How many of you really understand how God the Father is equal to God the Son is equal to God the Spirit? How many of us really understand the nature of God? Don't raise your hands because then I'd know that you were lying. Theologians have tried to find ways to understand and explain the nature of God for thousands of years and God is still a mystery. And that's as it should be. How could we, as finite creatures, understand the infinite Creator? It's an exercise in pride to even think that we could. But the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us something important. It has been said that all doctrine is experience first. To me that means that the doctrines, the teachings of the church, are attempts to explain what we have experienced in our encounters with God. The idea of the Trinity is the assertion that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there is only one God. "Father, Son and Holy Spirit mean that the mystery beyond us,

the mystery among us, and the mystery within us are all the same mystery. Thus the Trinity is a way of saying something about us and the way we experience God.”¹ The Trinity is also a way of saying something about God and the way is within himself, ie., God does not need the Creation in order to have something to love because within himself love happens. The scriptures today teach us that also. In John, Jesus says to the disciples that “all that the father has is mine, and he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” God does not just have love within God's self, but like love is bound to do, it overflows. God's love overflows to us. In Romans, Paul talks about God's love has been poured into our hearts. In my mind we are the empty vessels and God is like a pitcher of water pouring into us until we overflow as well with the love of God. During the next few weeks some of our third graders are working hard at memorizing the 23rd Psalm, the passage they traditionally memorize in this church in order to be presented with a Bible on Recognition Sunday. Remember the 23rd Psalm, the most familiar of Psalms? “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul, he leads me in right paths for his names sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Stop there. My cup overflows. That's how God is. God has such love within himself that his love overflows into us until we are overflowing with love. That's what the Trinity teaches us. The biblical scholar Lucy Lind Hogan says, “The Holy Trinity is about relationship and indwelling. It is about collaboration and the self-communication of God. The Trinity is about the mutuality of God within the God-head, about our invitation into the God-head by Jesus in the power of the *Paraclete*. And it is about our mutuality with each other, guiding, speaking, and declaring to one another the glory of God, Father/Creator, Jesus/Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is our way of life made possible by God.”²

That's what we wanted the youth to experience—an overflowing of God's love mediated by God's

1 Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking*, p. 93.

2 Hogan, Lucy Lind. *Working Preacher.org*. May 26, 2013

people. I don't really understand the Trinity, because the nature of God is not really for me to fully comprehend. But what I do know is that the Trinity is a relationship of love. And that's our example. Like we said, we didn't want the kids to experience what is, we wanted them to experience what should be—that the church is our safety net, that we love and care for each other. When the youth are out there in boxes, we are encouraging them. When someone is sick, we are praying for them. When someone doesn't have enough food, the church is there. When someone we love dies, the church is there in sympathy and hope. When we get into the college we wanted, the church rejoices with us. When we bring a child to be baptized, the church is there with us, promising to help us and support the child and taking baptismal vows seriously. We didn't really want the kids to feel homeless. We wanted the kids to feel that we are all in this together. We want you to know that too. We want everyone to know that we are in a holy relationship of love, and this is what it looks like.