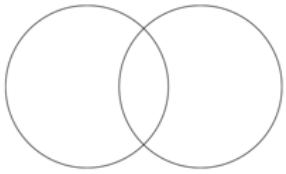
Jim's Sermon - Transfiguration Sunday - August 6, 2023

The Venn Diagram is said to have been discovered by a logician in the 20th century. The centre of the diagram, however, (the pointed oval shape) is actually an ancient sacred symbol and there are many examples of it in this church. Venn shapes can be found in many of our banners and stained glass windows.



The Venn diagram is about overlapping truths or overlapping realities, and for we who are followers of Jesus those overlapping realities are heaven and earth, humanity and divinity. The Venn diagram that frequently appears in a sacred icons is an aid to understanding that our existence is lived in this oval, this place where heaven and earth conjoin.

Living an overlapping existence sometimes feels like living in a kind of tension between two worlds. Ours is not a static existence. We often feel competing urges. On one hand we are drawn to a life of selfishness, and on the other we feel the call of a life lived in relationship to the divine. Even though we want to be drawn into the life of the spirit, the body of Christ, we may experience

resistance that come when we are required to be courageous, unselfish and giving. We live out our earthly existence in this in-between space. This is precisely the tension that St. Paul describes in Romans as the flesh and the spirit.

There are times when we are able to see and feel and hear the spirit, and other times when we aren't.

The passage from the Gospel of Luke that we just heard read, tells the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, in which the divine nature of Jesus, the veil between the human and the divine is momentarily lifted and the three friends of Jesus see his divinity manifested in a dramatic way. They see into the heavenly realm and recognize Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus.

As Anglican Christians, our sacramental life is designed to reveal the divine in the earthly. The sacraments are rituals through which we are invited to experience God's grace in a way that is physical as well as spiritual. Our Anglican faith teaches us that when we gather around the altar and pray the Eucharistic prayers (which the priest leads but which is actually a prayer of the whole church) the bread and wine, the most common of earthly elements are transformed, transfigured, into the body and blood of Jesus, and

that by sharing this simple but transformed food, we are transformed into the Body of Christ. This is transfiguration.

Other sacraments are designed along a common path, and each has its own physical representations: the laying on of hands, the holy oil, wedding rings. By engaging in these rituals we are transfigured and brought into closer communion with God and with one another. The sacrament of penance, asking for God's forgiveness and mercy, (which we also do every Sunday), and receiving that forgiveness solidifies our relationship to the divine, and frees us from the burden of guilt.

This sacramental life is designed to improve our spiritual vision. If you think about our physical vision, as amazing as it is, it is limited, even when we are young and it is 20 20, we are able to see only so much detail. We have discovered ways to improve our vision. Telescopes allow us to see far out into space. The James Webb telescope allows us to see galaxies 13.6 billion light years away. Electron microscopes allow us to identify single atoms. More commonly eyeglasses extend the ability of millions of people to see as they get older. We have found ways to enhance our senses and make them many times more efficient than they are unaided.

And we know that unaided, or senses, especially as we get older, don't always see or hear the world clearly.

The same is true of our spirits. We can enhance our ability to experience the divine in the world through the sacraments, prayer, sacred music, meditation and reading or listening to the scriptures.

Sacramental theology, transfiguration theology is about this truth: that the world of the spirit is not separated by time and distance. Tt is separated, rather, by the inability of most of us to see it clearly. Sacramental spirituality is about cultivating our spiritual senses, our capacity to experience the holy in the ordinary, the sacred in the profane, the divine in the human. And even if we don't begin to have visions of the heavenly hosts, what we will have is greater reverence for the earth, for the ordinary things in our day to day lives, for our fellow human beings, and for the holy spirit who resides in them.

What does this mean in the day to day? It means that we face a choice every moment of our lives, to choose to see the earth as simply matter, or to see the divine in *everything*, and to experience the spirit in our every movement, thought and feeling.

This is the message and the promise of our scriptures and particularly of today's Gospel, that God is here, there and everywhere. We need only choose to open ourselves to that possibility to see that divine essence everywhere we look.

But we mustn't judge our faith by how real God feels to us. There is no one way to experience the divine, any more than there is one way to experience friendship. The goal is to come into a deeper relationship with God. It is about our faithfulness and our trust that as we open ourselves, God will dwell ever more deeply in us.

This overlapping life (this Venn existence) is one in which we sometimes feel God and sometimes don't feel God.
Thomas Merton writes:

"God, Who is everywhere, never leaves us. Yet God seems sometimes to be present, sometimes to be absent. If we do not know God well, we do not realize that He may be more present to us when He is absent than when He is present."

The overlapping life is one in which we need constant reminders, we need to come together in prayer and to. Immerse ourselves in the tangible symbols of sacramental worship, we need the

assurance and faith of one another. This space in which the human and divine come together is not a space that we can inhabit alone. It is the community that holds us there.
And as we cultivate our spiritual lives together something marvellous happens to his space; it grows and expands, until one day there is no separation, and the two circles, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of earth, become one.

The Anglican scholar NT Wright says it well:
“Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven.”

And to that I think we can all say, Amen.