

SERMON
The Holy Trinity
May 30, 2010

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

It was a world of many gods. As Abraham set forth from the land of Ur into an unknown future, he brought with him a new kind of faith. This faith proclaimed that there was one God – who could no more be carved in stone or cast in metal than the sun could be bottled up in some portable container.

This was indeed a novel idea in a world where deities of all types abounded in the great mythical pantheons – the temples dedicated to all the gods. These gods were more often than not at odds with one another. ONE GOD! Abraham declared. ONE GOD! Moses proclaimed. ONE GOD! Isaiah announced, who was holy, holy, holy, beyond all human attempts to package and control.

Then came along the Christians. “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” What’s up with this? Still a unity of being, but also a Trinity of Persons – one God in three persons? This concept was confusing to say the least.

After all, the ancestors of Abraham had committed their entire lives to the worship of ONE God. It was very plain and simple. So for generations they had fought against the worship of multiple gods, many times to the point of losing their very lives.

Now, here come these Christians. They want to make things all complicated again.

Throughout the centuries, many scholars of the Church have tried to explain the conundrum. It is like the sun, one said, which we experience as a ball of energy we see in the sky, but also as the beams of light that stream down upon us, and still again as the emanating heat that warms us.

St. Augustine used what we would now call psychological categories to explain the Trinity in terms of memory, understanding and will.

There has also been some more simplistic explanations such as the Trinity is like a three leaf clover – one clover, but three leaves. Or how about the idea that God is like H₂O. It comes in three forms; ice, liquid, or steam, but it is still only H₂O. Or how a woman can, at the same time, be a mother, a daughter, and a wife, but still be one woman.

Let's face it, pastor's who follow the liturgical calendar often cringe when faced with the prospect of preaching on Trinity Sunday. I usually try to plan my vacation around this time of year, but this year it didn't work out. You see, Trinity Sunday is the only feast that seems to be named after a doctrine.

Notice that it is never mentioned in the Bible. Jesus never utters the words Trinity, or Triune God. So where did this doctrine of the Holy Trinity come from? Well, believe it or not, it did not come from a bunch of theologians who were sitting around with nothing better to do.

The doctrine developed as a means to describe how the One God in whom we believe relates to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was formed out of argument.

A fellow by the name of Marcion in the second Century taught that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were two different gods. The God in the Old Testament was harsh, cruel, and full of wrath and judgment. Jesus, on the other hand was kind, gentle and loving. Therefore, according to Marcion, we should reject the God of the Old Testament and believe in Jesus Christ.

Another guy named Arius taught that Jesus was not really God, but rather a demigod created by God the Father to be a mediator between heaven and earth.

Then there was a group called Enthusiasts who believed the coming of the Holy Spirit replaced God the Father and God the Son.

Therefore, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was formulated by the early church to describe the basic belief in God in three persons, each co-equal, co-eternal, one in essence and substance.

It was finally settled by an Ecumenical Council in the 4th century when the Church accepted the Nicene Creed, and later the Athanasian Creed, as official statements of faith. There, are we clear now?

You see, when it comes right down to it, many of us were taught that the doctrine of the Trinity was *mysterium stricte dictum*, that is, totally beyond human comprehension and expressible only through analogy.

So where does that leave us? Is there nothing more to be said? Well, let's listen again to the words of Jesus from today's Gospel reading: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. For all that the father has is mine."

In another place in John's Gospel, we hear Jesus declare, "Do you not know that the father is in me and I in the Father?" Still elsewhere he prays that his disciples may be one "even as the Father and I are one."

So here lies the heart of the matter. This is not the language of form and function. This is not the basis for the formulation of a doctrine. This is the language of relationship, the language of mutual devotion. Do you see it? The Trinity is not about what we believe. It is about how God relates to us and how we relate to God.

A twelfth-century scholar, Richard of St. Vincent, reflected on this and spoke of God in terms of shared love, a community in which that love is expansive and generous. It is love that cannot be self contained. It overflows from Parent to Child to Spirit and back again.

You see, the love of God, the love that IS God is like a divine dance, a dynamic and graceful and deeply intimate movement. And in this movement, the God who is "I AM" is not alone – never alone. For the very essence of God is relationship. Do you follow me?

This is very different from those mythological deities of old who were always fighting with one another, rivals and annoyances of one another. No, what we see in the Trinity is a dance of Persons who are mutually affirming – mutually caring. For the very essence of God is relationship, community, and unconditional love.

It is even more remarkable then, that God, who in this Dance of Persons needing no other, decides to invite his creation into the Dance. The invitations have been sent. There are no mere spectators on the Dance floor. There are no outcasts, no outsiders. For the Dance includes us. It includes you and me.

It doesn't matter if we are good looking or just average. It doesn't matter if we are rich or poor or middle class. It doesn't matter if we are old or young, male or female, gay or straight. It doesn't matter if we are a regular sinner or think that we just sin once in a while. It doesn't matter if we are black or white or brown or somewhere in between. It doesn't matter what we have done in the past. It just doesn't matter. We are welcome at the Dance.

Remember the words that were said at your baptism? "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever". It describes what it means to be part of the Dance.

The prophet Isaiah said it beautifully; "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." So not only are we invited to the Dance, we are invited... by name.

Chuck Robertson, an Episcopal Priest writes the following; “I was walking through the grounds of Emory University in Atlanta when from a distance I saw Desmond Tutu, Nobel Laureate and Archbishop Emeritus of South Africa. He was guest-teaching there at the time. He was accompanied by a large man who was his assistant.

Eager to meet this legendary figure, I ran towards him, only to be immediately put off by his companion. ‘The bishop is busy,’ I was told.

Turning away and feeling like little more than chopped liver, I suddenly heard a small but powerful voice; ‘Come, come.’ As I approached him, Bishop Tutu smiled and said, ‘Tell me your name.’ I did, and he responded, ‘And tell me about yourself.’

For the next ten minutes, I received his full and complete attention. For that time, I was someone of infinite value. As I turned to leave, the bishop looked me in the eye and quietly said, ‘I will remember you, Chuck Robertson.’ Not chopped liver. No. Beloved. Part of the Dance.”

As I look around, all too often I see people who desperately need to know what this is like. People who feel alone, cast out, unloved. What would happen if we looked at all those around us with fresh eyes? What if we could see them all as fellow partners on God’s Dance floor?

On this Trinity Sunday, God gives us a priceless gift that we can and must share with all those we meet, all those who are carrying heavy burdens, so heavy, that they have forgotten who they are and whose they are.

We can dare to look them in the eye and quietly remind them, “not only with our lips but in our lives”, that they are not God and don’t need to be. For there is ONE God, who is relationship, who is Divine Dance, who is Love. And we all are God’s beloved. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting. Amen.

Do any of you know what a compass is? *It's something that has a little arrow inside of it that tells you what direction you are going.*

Did you know that on our earth, there are 4 different directions we can go? *They are called North, South, East and West. Have any of you heard those words before?*

Directions are important, because they tell us how to get places. Let's say we wanted to take a trip to Mexico, which way would we go? *South.* What if we wanted to go to California, which way would we go? *West.* How about if we wanted to go to Minnesota where I used to live? *North.*

A compass also helps if you get lost. Have any of you ever been lost before? That can be scary. A compass can help you get back on track.

Just like a compass can tell us which direction we are going, God gives us a spiritual compass that will guide our lives. That guide is called the Holy Spirit. This guide lives inside of each and every one of us. When we don't know what to do or what to say, the Holy Spirit always points us in the right direction.

In our Bible story today, Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit "to guide us in all truth." That means that the Holy Spirit will help us to understand God's Word which always points us in the right direction. It points us to Jesus who is always there to love us.

So whenever you don't know which way to turn, you can always turn to God's Word and let the Holy Spirit inside or you be your guide.

Lord, we thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to be our guide through life. We know that the Spirit will lead us to Jesus. In his name we pray, amen.