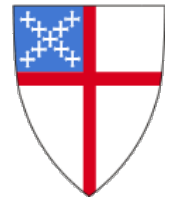




## Sermon for Trinity Sunday, May 30, 2024

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Isaiah 6:1-8

Romans 8:12-17

John 3:1-17

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ever One God. Amen.*

Dear Folks –

Today is our last big holy day in the Church Year, until we get to the fall season. Today is the Feast of the Holy Trinity. It is the only major holy day in the church that celebrates a theological teaching or doctrine rather than an event or person. Today, we celebrate God as Christians over the ages have come to know the One God who is Three Distinct but Intertwined Natures. Our opening hymn, with all those verses, is a famous prayer of praise and protection attributed to St. Patrick, who brought Christian faith to Ireland. I love that turn of phrases in the hymn that describe God – “the Three in One, and One in Three.”

I want to emphasize that what we do today is celebrate, honor, and devote ourselves to this God who is Triune. We don't walk away from today fully understanding the essence and natures of God – any more than we fully understand ourselves or any person or creature. We come together to let our imaginations be taken to glimpses of the fullness of God, and we leave today with minds and hearts stretched.

Three in One and One in Three. What is that even like?

Last year, at an art fair in Spokane, I met a woman originally from China who made intricate art from interwoven folded paper imprinted with different colors and designs. There were dragons, and lilies, and trees, and intricate geometric patterns. I bought this smaller piece she made, an intricate symbol for the Trinity. Take a close look at it. You have a version of this design on the first page of your bulletin. Watch as I trace around the arcs coming from each of the three points. Each moves and turns, continuously, so that it is one continuous line that interweaves. But then look at the shapes. There are three eye-like shapes that are complete in themselves – but each also blends into the next. Go ahead and trace around the lines of the space in your own bulletin... Now, note the circle that holds and interweaves with these three intertwined shapes. All is together in this circle – and yet, all is not simply contained by the circle. The shapes are not simply part of the circle, they have their own uniqueness – but they are entwined in the whole and make the whole fuller.



Now, let this symbol begin to open up pictures and perceptions for you of one God with three distinct but fully intertwined natures. Not three separate gods like three separate shapes, and not simply three parts or roles of the same, like parts of a circle. Let your imagination begin to follow and see how there can be three who are distinct but are so close with each other that they are infused with each other.

Christian faith arose in a polytheistic world, within a pocket of people in the Empire who were monotheists. A world of many gods, all separate and acting autonomously and not in harmony with each other. And a smaller nation of people who saw and gave themselves to one God. At the time, there were philosophies and religious ideas brewing about one far-removed God who was source of everything, from whom some or many lesser gods emanated or were spun off.

And here are people now who follow the life of Jesus, the one who taught and revealed one God, who claimed to be the Son of God, who called God Father and said, "I and the Father are One." And here are these people who have experienced the movement of the Holy Spirit, an experience of God being intimately close and moving yet not with a body, this one who was promised by Jesus. And so, there are three ways they have experienced and known God, and yet they claim one God. How does this fit in the world of this time?

There were lots of wrestlings and arguments and differing ideas. In the end, this was where bishops and teachers of the Church landed together, in the great councils of the Church in the 300s. We have a text attributed to one primary teacher and leader from this time, in our prayerbook. Please take out your Book of Common Prayer, and turn to page 864. This is a document known as the Athanasian Creed. Athanasius was a major defender of the Nicene Creed, against teachings that diminished any persons of the Trinity. This document may not have been from his pen, but it captures some of the spirit of the conversations of that time. Let's read some portions of it together, side to side and in different groups, to hear these ways of describing God and to let our imaginations trace the lines and shapes they are drawing.

*We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity,  
neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.  
For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.  
But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory  
equal, the Majesty co-eternal.*

*Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.  
The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated.  
The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost  
incomprehensible.  
The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.*

*And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal.  
As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and  
one incomprehensible.  
So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty.  
And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.*

*So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.  
And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.  
So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord.  
And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.*

*.....  
The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten.  
The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.  
The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten,  
but proceeding.*

*So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.  
And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another;  
But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.  
So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.*

So, envision – these Three in One are not mirror images but are each in themselves fully all that God – but these Three are also distinct in nature, in all that we might imagine makes for personhood – but these Three are always One, always in total connected relationship, always One in what we humans might call mind and heart, and certainly in power and in love.

So, what does this have to do with us, God's creatures?

Our readings today give us insight into how this God moves and acts in and with us creatures. The readings from John and from Romans are particularly helpful.

Let's begin with Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Here comes Nicodemus, a leader of our own tribe (our identity group – that's how we can best read the Gospel of John saying "the Jews"). He is taking a big step, seeking what Jesus is showing – and stepping outside his set identity. He comes by night, away from the busy-ness of daily life, when people were settling into the quiet of their own spaces.

Jesus begins by telling Nicodemus that we must be born from above / from top / from the start/source. This sometimes is translated as "born anew" or "born again." But "born from the starting point" really captures more of the meaning. So, we must be born from that place where everything begins.

Jesus then goes on to describe how the Spirit moves. To be born of water and the Spirit is to be born of that which flows and washes and cleanses. He goes on to say, "Just like with wind, you don't know where the Spirit is flowing to, where it all comes from or where it all goes."

So, to be in relationship with God is to be made new, again and again, as we allow yourself to be in contact with the One where everything begins. And then, to let yourself be in that flow that is always and forever flowing. Let yourself be washed and carried by that flow. You do not know where it will come from, but you can sense it happening, and you do not know where it will carry you. So be it. Trust in this God who will carry you to places in life that you did not imagine.

Jesus then brings it home in the verses that together sum up the entirety of God's good news. These verses are John 3:16-17. We all know John 3:16, from it being on display at ball games. What is it?

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

But it's really the next verse that brings it all home.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

The bottom line is that this God, who is forever three-in-one, loves us and all creation. Passionately. Completely. Without reservation, without exception. This God has made us in love, has come among us in love and saved us in love, and sustains us with ever-flowing love. As Paul says in Romans 8,

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This is who we worship. This is who we follow. This is the Light Eternal, eager to embrace us all.

Friends, today especially, but every day, let us open ourselves to this God. Let us open our hearts to love and adore this God. Come into the light. Treasure no darkness, let this Light fill all your mind and heart and imagination. And, in the presence of this Light that is the everliving, everloving God, let the cry arise from within you, like it did in Isaiah when he saw the throne of God – “I am a person not clean yet I have seen the most Holy, the Source of all that is.” At that same moment, we find rising within us a voice of adoration that is the cry of love – “Abba! Father! Amma! Mother!” It is the cry of the breath of life itself within us, the Spirit of God that is the Spirit of Life, the Love itself that flows eternally in this Holy Trinity – that Love so full, so complete, so passionate, so embracing, that it overflows and sparks – and creates all things. Let us love and adore the God of Love, who is Lover, and Beloved, and Love itself, all at once. To touch that flow, we might begin to know something about how to love ourselves, and to love all others, each of us made in the image of God.

Stand with me, friends! This sermon ends with us declaring our adoration of this God, in the words of the ancient Nicene Creed that celebrates and embraces God who is ever Three in One. And as we say these words together, let them carry you into a closer view of God, and let the word “believe” take on its truer, older meaning – when we say, “We believe in,” let it mean more truly, “We give ourselves to, we align ourselves fully with, we immerse ourselves in.” Let us cry in adoration together!

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.*

*Through him all things were made.*

*For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:*

*by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.*

*On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;*

*he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.*

*He has spoken through the Prophets.*

*We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.*

*We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*

*We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*