

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

May 31, 2015 Joseph Klenzmann

Church of the Holy Comforter, Richmond, VA

God Is Over, With and In Us

Let us pray

Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word and know your voice.

Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today, now and always.

Amen

Good Morning several weeks ago I asked Reverend Hilary if she would like me to preach today, knowing she had a wedding the previous day.

Little did I know that May 31st was Trinity Sunday, perhaps the most difficult, complicated and mysterious doctrine to preach on.

Oh well there is a lesson in this; I should check the lectionary before I go and volunteer to preach again. So here we go.

Every year the church celebrates the trinity.

But why?

Because, Trinity Sunday allows us an opportunity to look closely at one of the most central mysteries in our Christian Faith.

It allows us to see how God is Over Us, How God is with us, and how God is in us.

We need to look towards the scriptures just as our ancestors did because the scriptures were essential to the formation of the Doctrine.

One of, the most useful resources we have at our disposal is the Book of Common Prayer. It quietly sits in the pew or on a bookshelf waiting to be used. It has so many answers in it. No matter your question or point of view, you will find something in it that you can agree with.

When I looked to the "Articles of Religion", which is our statement of Christian faith, the first article, the most important article is on the Holy Trinity. It says:

"There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. In addition, in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. "

One of my favorite words that I have learned in my studies to describes the indescribable Trinity, is the word Gestalt. Gestalt, it even sounds cool when you say it, Gestalt.

Webster's defines it as "something that is made of many parts and yet is somehow more than or different from the combination of its parts" or its parts" or in other words, the whole is greater than the sum of its part. But why do we need the Trinity, the scriptures say there is one God. In Deuteronomy, we read "Hear O Lord Israel, The Lord our God is one God"¹ this is foundational to what we say about God. In Isaiah, it says "I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God."²

Well that cleared it up, there is just one God.

But wait a minute, there is a problem; a paradox of sorts. If there is one true God, than what about the three?

Throughout the bible, God is plural. Doesn't this contradict the One True God statement?

As an example, In Genesis, God says, "Let us make man in our image." This God is singular, but He is speaking of Himself in plural terms.

When John baptized Jesus, God the Father says from heaven, "This is my beloved Son." Of course, God the Son is in the water. Then God the Spirit is descending.

In the gospel of John, Jesus said: "I and the Father are one",³ and "He who has seen Me has seen the Father".⁴

Jesus also taught the church to baptize in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

That also makes it very clear there are three persons. How can this contradiction be, or, is it a contradiction at all?

The early leaders of the church tried to define something that could not be defined. God is so completely different, so separate from anything in existence that all metaphors and analogies are false because they cannot completely describe God.

We have all heard some of these analogies before:

¹ Deuteronomy 6:4

² Isaiah 45:5

³ John 10:30

⁴ John 14:9

God is like Water, it can be in three forms but one substance, ice, liquid, or steam. Well that does not quite do it, because the three coexist, this heresy is called Maudilism.

Or

God is Like the Sun. The son and the spirit are like heat and light, just passive bi-products of the sun. This does not work either, because this heretical view states the Father is superior to the Son and Holy Spirit and not true equals and different in divine nature... This Heresy is called Arianism.

Saint Augustine of Hippo, a Doctor of the Church, did not believe in Arianism. Around 419 he wrote his thesis on the Trinity.

He believed and wanted to show how each member of the Trinity has the same essential nature and how the Trinity was a necessary configuration of God. Augustine expressed his complicated thesis in these simple terms. He stated:

- The greatness of the Father plus the greatness of the Son equals the greatness of the Holy Spirit.
- The greatness of the Son plus the greatness of the Holy Spirit equals the greatness of the Father.
- The greatness of the Father plus the greatness of the Holy Spirit equals the Son.

He also stated this thesis in mathematical terms to better illustrate it:

Two Persons equals One Person.

This does not mathematically work unless you realize that each aspect of God is infinite.

Put another way two Infinities equals One Infinity

All three persons of the Trinity must have the same nature for this thesis to be true.

Augustine also stated this in grammatical terms.

In order for there to be "The Word"(Jesus), there must be the speaking of the word, or the action (the Holy Spirit), and the speaker (The Father).

There is no word before the speaker says it, there is no speaker after he has spoken it.

All three elements exist simultaneously in the same instant that the speaker speaks the word.

Mind blown

The heretics, and the theologians were just trying to get it right; it took almost three hundred years of reflecting, quarreling, and debating the scriptures at councils and in the streets to define the basic doctrine of our faith. We will recite this ancient doctrine in the form of the Nicene Creed.

Here is another paradox. God who is so completely separate, so different from us, is nonetheless intimately, and fully present in this world.

God is Above Us; He is the creator of the cosmos and governs it. He is our protector, King and Lord, and the one who Jesus called Father.

God is with us; He is the savior, the link, the bond between the wicked and the divine, reuniting, rescuing us. Allowing us contact with the Father through him. He is the one who God called son.

God is In Us. Not only does this God create and saves, this God sustains us and everything that has been created. This God renews, restores, uplifts, and empowers us.

What do our readings tell us about the Trinity

In Isaiah, we find him in the temple where he does not see God; he only sees the hem of his robe, just the hem. He knows he is in big trouble. Even the seraphim cover their eyes because they are not worthy to see God. One of them said:

“Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!”

The first part of this states Isaiah’s understanding of God, while the second part assures us of the presents of God in our world.

The temple starts shaking, and fills with smoke; Isaiah knows for sure how very un-worthy he is.

It is almost a scene from Wayne’s World “*we’re not worthy, we’re not worthy*”.

He calls out;

“Woe *is* me, for I am undone!

Because I *am* a man of unclean lips,

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;

For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts.”

The significance of this reading is that the author is trying to establish the holiness of God. Actually, the root of the word holiness is the word separation. God’s pure nature is so separate from our “unclean” human nature. The separation between God and man is a central theme in the ancient world and a useful tool when interpreting Isaiah.

In Romans, Paul is talking about our life in the spirit is more than just an identity, it is a relationship with God. The separation between God and man is overcome when God adopts us making us children of God and heirs to the Kingdom.

In the Gospel of John, he uses one of his favorite literary tools; John sets up a narrative or dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemous. Nicodemous does not understand what Jesus is saying and this allows him to go into a speech.

The key verse is John, 3, 16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

But why is the Trinity so important we celebrate it every year? Because it is at the core of our faith and without the trinity, we could not have salvation.

Salvation begins with the Father; he is the mastermind of our salvation and administers the process from beginning to end. The son delivers salvation. Everything the Father does for salvation he is doing it through Christ.

The Son brings salvation to fulfillment. Through Christ, we receive reconciliation and adoption by the father. It is only through Christ we can be in full relationship with the triune God.

The Holy Spirit communicates salvation. The indwelling of the spirit changes us from the inside out. Its light shines in us, so brightly that people see that we are somehow, some way changed, we are made stronger by the spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us our precious spiritual gifts and seals us at baptism as children of God. ([Ephesians 1:1-14](#))

But how does knowledge of the Trinity help us today. To sum it up I would have to say, that to have a better, deeper relationship with someone that you love, you must get to know them better and this enriches the connection. Studying the Trinity has shown me the divine threefold essence of God and it is the unconditional love that bonds the three into one. Lucky for us it is the same love he has for the universe.

Let us pray.

Most Loving God the Father who is above us, God the Son who is with us, and God the Holy Comforter who is in us, and God the Holy Comforter who is in us. We give thanks to you for the salvation you have given us and we ask for continued support from the Holy Spirit so we may do the work you have given us to do. Amen