

Trinity Sunday Year C

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

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6/12/2022

Happy Trinity Sunday!

This is a principal feast day in the Church.

And it is the only feast day that derives from a theological understanding...

Other feast days are tied around events, a person, or people.

Trinity Sunday is about how God reveals himself to us.

As one God... yet three in one.

God in three persons...

Blessed Trinity.

It is a mystery...

But it is the doctrine of the church.

We say that God is triune – one divine nature in unity of three persons and that God is revealed as three distinct persons:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is also a doctrine that we confess...

In the Creeds of the Church...

We say:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty...

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ...

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord...

This revelation of the nature and being of God is found in our Holy Scripture.

Certainly, the word Trinity is not found in the scriptures...

As it first appeared with the Church Fathers...

But this revelation of God is present in the Bible.

We find it as early as the book of Genesis.

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in **our image**, in **our likeness**, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

(Genesis 1.26)

We know that humankind is made in the image of God...

such an important doctrine of scripture...

The *imago Dei*...

And here in Genesis when we find reference to it...

God says *Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...*

It is plural.

Of course, we know in this ancient Jewish literature that it is not trying to communicate that there is a plurality of gods.

Judaism and Christianity are monotheistic.

It is indicating God – three-in-one.

It is about the only place in the Old Testament with the most connection to the Trinity...

But we do see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit present in the Old Testament.

Of course, God... the Father and Creator of the world is mentioned throughout the Older Testament...

Jesus, God the Son, is also present throughout.

The one who walked in the cool of the morning in the garden of Eden was Jesus (Genesis 3.8)

The great preacher and 18th c. intellectual Jonathan Edwards wrote:

*When we read of God appearing after the fall, in some visible form, we are ordinarily, if not universally, to understand it of the second person of the Trinity.*¹

¹ *History of the Work of Redemption*, 20

Jesus is present elsewhere too...

The “I Am” in whom Abraham rejoiced was Jesus (John 8:56–58).

The Lord who motivated Moses was Christ (Hebrews 11:26).

The Redeemer who brought them out of Egypt was Jesus (Jude 5).

The Rock in the wilderness was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

The King of Isaiah’s temple vision was the Son (John 12:40–41).

Jesus is actually the central figure in the Old Testament.

Jesus, himself, on the road to Emmaus (after his resurrection) told the disciples...

St. Luke writes:

*...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning **himself**.*

(Luke 24.27)

The Holy Spirit is also in the Old Testament.

In the second verse of Genesis 1 we read:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The Holy Spirit was present at creation.

The Spirit came upon certain judges, warriors, and prophets of the Old Testament in a way that gave them extraordinary power: for example, Joshua (Num. 27:18), Gideon (6:34), and Samson (13:25; 14:6).

David, who knew the Holy Spirit, did not want God's Spirit to leave him.

In his repentant Psalm, Psalm 51, David wrote:

*Do not cast me from your presence
or take your **Holy Spirit** from me.*

(v. 11)

God did not become triune...

God did not develop into three persons with the birth of Jesus and then the sending of the Holy Spirit...

God was and is and always will be God – three-in-one.

Now, throughout the New Testament you can find the three persons of the Trinity in formulaic fashion.

Our two New Testament readings today point toward the Holy Trinity.

In Romans we read Father, Son, and Spirit.

St. Paul wrote:

*Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with **God [the Father]** through our **Lord Jesus Christ**, ... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the **Holy Spirit** that has been given to us.*

In the Gospel of John, we heard:

*Jesus said, "...When the **Spirit** of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.... He will glorify **me [Jesus]**, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the **Father** has is mine...."*

Now the formal doctrine of the Trinity came many years later in the church.

As many things seem to come, it is through the strains of difficulty that clarity is brought forth.

It is often when we are challenged we find ourselves needing to formulate what we really believe.

The Nicene Creed mostly developed in the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD was produced to set the doctrine of God – three-in-one – in place.

Rev. Dr. Justin Holcomb writes:

After a century of debate over the nature of the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed is perhaps the most famous and influential creed in the history of the church, because it settled the question of how Christians can worship one God and also claim that this God is three persons.²

This produced statements like this one from 4th-century Archbishop of Constantinople and theologian Gregory of Nazianzus.

He wrote:

We proclaim concisely and simply the doctrine of God the Trinity, comprehending out of Light (the Father), Light (the Son), in Light (the Holy Ghost)... Was and Was and Was, but Was One Thing, Light thrice repeated; but One Light.... In Thy Light shall we see Light.³

The Athanasian Creed, which we will say today, came later toward the end of the 5th century...

That is the history and development of the understanding of the Holy Trinity.

² Justin S. Holcomb, *Know The Creeds and Councils* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 63.

³ Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), 524.

It is now embedded in our prayers and liturgical forms...

A simple example is in the prayer - *Gloria Patri*:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

Centuries after the last book of the New Testament was written the doctrine of the Trinity was developed in more clarity.

The church takes its time building important scriptural understanding...

And this is still good practice even in the fast-paced world of our contemporary Western society.

The church should always move on God's time...

Not cultures time.

Nevertheless, the doctrine that we confess and believe every time we gather for worship is an expression of God revealed to us.

But believing and confessing the doctrine of the Trinity is one thing... understanding it is on a whole different level...

St. Augustine, while puzzling over the doctrine of the Trinity, was walking along the beach one day when he observed a young boy with a bucket, running back and forth to pour water into a little hole. Augustine asked, "What are you doing?"

The boy replied, "I'm trying to put the ocean into this hole."

At that moment, St. Augustine realized that he had been trying to put an infinite God into his finite mind.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery...

A glorious mystery.

One that we are unable to fully grasp.

I was encouraged in my studies this week by the words of Dr. Mike Higton...

A professor of Theology and Ministry at Durham University

He wrote concerning the Trinity:

God is more than our minds can grasp.

We... can't know how God's life works,

and when we say that God is three-in-one

that's not meant to help us tie God down;

it does not tell us how God's life works.

*It does not mean we get to say,
'Oh yes, now I get it, now I see what it all means,
now it all makes sense to me'
No, it is not meant to help us put God in a box.
In fact, it's meant to help us not to put God in a box.
It's meant to point us to ways in which
there is more to God than we might have thought –
more to God's life,
more to God's love,
more to the way God shares God's life with us.*

So...

I hope at the conclusion of this sermon today that you have been encouraged in two ways.

First, that you have a better understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity... at least what the belief is based on and where it comes from.

Second, that the doctrine of the Trinity is really to help you see just how big, majestic, and glorious God is.

We won't figure God all the way out.

I will leave you with one last quote from Dr. Mike Higton.

He said:

I don't need to know how it works

I just need to trust that it's true –

to know it, to feel it, to rest in it.

I pray as you contemplate the great mysteries of God...

In Scripture, in prayer, in sacrament, and in God's people...

That you would know him...

Feel him...

And rest in him.

Happy Trinity Sunday.

Amen.