

St. Paul's Church Healdsburg  
The Reverend Sally Hanes Hubbell  
June 15, 2014, Trinity Sunday  
Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8 ; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

We've arrived at an important day – this day is a really big deal. Not just because this is the last Sunday that we will have our lovely choir singing with us and for us, until after Labor Day. Not just because this is the last day that we'll have two services on Sunday morning for the rest of the summer. And, not just because this is Father's Day. As big a deal as all of those things are, they aren't the reason I'm thinking about.

Today is important for us here in church because it is Trinity Sunday. Today we celebrate the full recognition of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Church calendar, or Church year begins on the first Sunday in Advent with the preparation for the birth of Jesus, and between then and now we work towards the full revelation of God as the Father and creator (as in our OT reading for this morning), God the son (the fullness of the resurrected Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit (which the Church received last week at Pentecost).

A few weeks ago I said in a sermon that as the season of Easter was winding down, all of our readings and especially what Jesus says as he prepares the disciples for his ascension into heaven, point us toward today, toward Trinity Sunday, and the full recognition of God as Father Son and Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit) because we will need that recognition to carry us through the entire rest of the year until we reach Advent again on the first Sunday of December. Now we begin the long stretch of "Ordinary Time" that will carry us through until then.

Trinity Sunday is usually considered a tough Sunday to preach, because how do we explain all of this three in one and one in three business in a way that makes sense? The Trinity is one of the central mysteries and paradoxes of Christian theology – some would say it's one of the central contradictions of our faith. Certainly for people who require a clear cut, logical explanation of a God in whom they will believe, this impossible illogic of the unity of the Trinity and the trinity of the Unity is a deal breaker.

However, this same mystery and paradox is also a selling point to some people – particularly to people of a more mystical bent. There is a website that I sometimes go to for sermon ideas and inspiration called The Edge of Enclosure<sup>1</sup> which relishes this kind of mystical understanding of the Christian faith, and boy did it have a lot to offer for Trinity Sunday. It was packed this week with beautiful, albeit rather esoteric insights into the meaning of the Trinity. Here are some examples of the less esoteric insights that I thought might resonate with some of you:

This one is from the Confessions of St. Agustin: "Can anyone comprehend the almighty Trinity? Everyone talks about it- but is it really the Trinity of which they talk? Rare indeed is the person who understands the subject of his discourse, when

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Guthrie, The Edge of Enclosure <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/>

he speaks of that. People argue and wrangle over it, yet no one sees that vision unless he is at peace.

I wish they would turn their attention to the triad they have within themselves. It is, to be sure, a triad far distant from the Trinity, but I propose it as a topic on which they may exercise their minds, by way of experiment and in order to make clear to themselves how great the difference is. The triad I mean is being, knowledge and will. I am, and I know, and I will. Knowingly and willingly I exist; I know that I am and that I will; I will to be and to know. Let anyone with the wit to see it observe how in these three there is one inseparable life: there is one life, one mind and one essence. How inseparable they are in their distinctness! Yet distinction there is. Everyone has himself readily available for inspection; let each, then, scrutinize himself, and see what he can find, and tell me." (Chapter 13:11-12)

Here is another one from the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams: "Knowing the Trinity is being involved in this circling movement: drawn by the Son towards the Father, drawn into the Father's breathing out of the Spirit so that the Sons' life may be again made real in the world. It is where contemplation and action become inseparable (The Dwelling of the Light: Praying with Icons of Christ)."

"Knowing the Trinity is being involved in this circling movement."

I like that because it carries with it a very important component of all Trinitarian theology, which is movement, living, never stagnant movement. This quality of God is described in Eastern Orthodox theology with the term "Perichoresis," which literally means *dance*. The concept here is that within God's own self there is essentially a dance of love going on between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. It's an ever-happening movement within God that also flows out of God into all of creation.

This image of dancing and of the inclusion of all creation in the dance is picked up again in my favorite quotation, from a theologian with whom I wasn't before familiar, Catherine Mowry LaCugna (late RCC feminist theologian): "Trinitarian life is also our life...There is one life of the Triune God, a life in which we graciously have been included as partners... a comprehensive plan of God reaching from creation to consummation, in which God and all creatures are destined to exist together in the mystery of love and communion." - (God for Us)

We must remember that when we call God Trinity, when we say that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we aren't using a proper name. In other words, we aren't saying this is what God is called; we're saying, God is this relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The only name for God we have is to name the relationship that is within God and that is God. It's the relationship that is "in the beginning" at work in the creation of the world, and it is the relationship that in the end is the basis of John's assertion that God is Love.

When we say that the God of all creation is first and foremost a relationship, we are saying something really important about the nature of the universe, which leads to the last quote I want to share with you. On the surface it doesn't appear to be about the Trinity, but it is. Thomas Berry says: "The universe is not a collection of objects, but a communion of subjects." The Trinity teaches us that when we look at the vast universe God has created, it is not a collection of objects to be pondered

from a remote distance, but rather it is more like a vast playground full of potential playmates. It is like a choir, willing our voices to chime in and join the harmony. It is a dancehall full of potential partners. The universe is one great big, invitation to live in the image of God, which means it is an invitation to love as we are loved. The God who is Trinity can never be construed as a cool and distant creator who set the planets and stars in motion, lined up the molecules that would lead to life on earth and then walked away.

Calling God Father, Son and Holy Spirit means that we believe God chooses to be part of the world through, never ending and ever-unfolding relationship with creation. God created all things with a mind bent toward goodness, and he spoke to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets because throughout all of the generations God loves his creation. God became man as Jesus Christ because God desires to share ever more intimately the joy and suffering of humanity. And God lives among us still as the Holy Spirit, guiding our steps, enlightening our minds, and setting our hearts on fire. There is no stopping the movement of love, the dance of love, that is ever-present within God and which is forever reaching out towards us.

God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; God is relationship; God is love. All of these are descriptors of who God is, through what God does. And what God does is reach out to us constantly and continually with an invitation to join the dance.

And we can choose to get off the bench and play. Because God is who God is, the creator of the universe and the creator of us, beloved and made in God's own image, the whole world and whole entire universe is an invitation to dance. infinite playground of relationships.

But as I sat down to work on this sermon, I realized that in the spirit of this church-on-fire in the season after Pentecost (which I claim we are), I should be encouraging you all to find your own theological voices--I should encourage you to speak in that sometimes tricky tongue of theology! So, I'm going to let you take on the challenge of Trinity Sunday.

Let's hear it: Who is God the Father?

Who is God the Son?

Who is God the Spirit?

How do these three "persons" work together? It's all about RELATIONSHIPS!

This construct of the Trinity is as much about us as it is about God, because it's all about God's relationship with us. In a nutshell, the Trinity is about presence -- it's about the presence of God in time and space, and how God is right here, right now. It's about how God is alive and at work in our lives throughout history, at this very moment, and in all of eternity. It's about God being omnipresent (present everywhere) in the past, present and future. And since all things will eventually pass away *except God*, it's also about God being omnipotent, all powerful, because God is the lord of all time and will never pass away. The Trinity is about how God is going to carry his love for us, his life giving, all powerful, love for us right on into eternity. And because of that, we will live eternally in him.

Just remember, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is about God being here (wherever here is), and now (whenever now is) to love us--to love you and to love me. That is the Trinity. That's what it's all about.

So now, here we are, present at this moment *with God*. Once we understand that, the big question we have to ask is less about who God is, and more about who we are in light of God. How does our knowing God change our understanding of who we are and what we're meant to be doing with our lives?

2 Cor 13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

**Matthew 28:16-20**

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Paradoxically, the One moves from itself into the Three and yet remains One, while the Three return to the One and yet remain Three. The single divinity of the Trinity is undivided and the three Persons of the one divinity are unconfused. We confess Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, divided yet without division and united yet with distinctions.-St.Thalassius the Libyan d.ca 660**

### **The Trinity in the Soul**

**In the seventh dwelling, everything is new. Now our great God is ready to remove the scales from the eyes of the soul so that she can see and understand something of the blessing he is granting her. He does this in a strange and inexplicable way. The soul enters the innermost chamber through a transcendental vision of the three divine Persons, which imparts to her a particular representation of truth. At first, an incredible clarity descends on the soul like a luminous cloud, setting her spirit on fire and illuminating each of the three aspects of God individually. At the same time, through a wondrous kind of knowledge, she apprehends the truth that all three divine Person as are one substance and one power and one knowing and one God alone.**

**The soul realizes then that what the rest of us know by faith, you might say, she understands by sight. But this is not a seeing with the eyes of the body or even the eyes of the soul. It isn't a visual revelation. Here, all three Persons communicate themselves to the soul. They speak to her, explaining things, like what Christ meant in the gospels when he said that he and the Father and the Holy Spirit come to dwell inside the soul who loves God and honors his ways.**

**Oh, Lord help me! There's a big difference between believing these words by hearing them and being led to understand the truth they represent in this direct and wondrous way! The soul is more amazed every day as she discovers that these divine Persons never leave her anymore. Through this sublime knowing she clearly sees that they are with her always. She perceives their sacred presence in a radically inner place, inside her own depths. She just hasn't learned the language to be able to explain this knowing.**

**You may think that an experience like this would propel the soul beyond herself, that she would become so absorbed she could focus on nothing else. Actually, when it comes to doing anything relating to serving God, she is more present than ever before. As soon as she finishes such a task, she rests again in that divine companionship.-Teresa of Avila 1515-1582 The Interior Castle (Seventh Dwelling, ch.1) trans. Mirabai Starr**

