

“The Source...The Holy Spirit”

Person

Matthew 28:16-20

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The last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew to His disciples are, “I am with you always to the end of the age.” Or as Obi Wan Kenobi says to Luke Skywalker, “The force will be with you always.” **(video)** (Star Wars IV: A New Hope)

That Force, if you will, is the Holy Spirit. We begin a new sermon series today not called the Force, but the Source: the Holy Spirit. The Person, the Presence, the Power, and the Purpose.

Yes these words in Matthew are some of Jesus last words to His disciples. After His resurrection Jesus was on earth for 40 days until He ascended into heaven. In fact this Thursday, May 25, is Ascension Day—40 days from His resurrection.

Jesus Himself invokes the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. We here sermons and teaching about God or Jesus, but for the next 4 weeks we will be looking at the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an “it” or a “thing,” but a Person. It is hard to understand.

Take a look at this. **(video of wind blowing Palm Trees)** How many saw the wind blowing the trees? Xxxx Trick question. I did not actually see any wind. I’ve never seen the wind. I’ve seen what wind does. The wind was evident on those palm trees by its presence and its power, but I didn’t actually see the wind, I saw the effects of the wind.

We think of God the creator, Jesus who came as man to live among us, and the Holy Spirit Who came with His power and presence after Jesus ascended. We have symbols that we often use. 2 common ones are the Holy Spirit as a Dove and Fire. **(image)** When Jesus was baptized scripture says “the Spirit of God descending like a dove came to rest on him” (Matthew 3:17). In Acts chapter 2 it says “a sound like a mighty rushing wind..filled the entire house...and tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:2-4)

Why even the universal symbol and registered trademark of the United Methodist Church is that of a flame **(image)** representing the Holy Spirit.

Another common example of the Trinity is the triangle **(image)**. Three points one image. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We have core beliefs in the United Methodist Church. They are stated in our denominations Articles of Religion. Here is what it says about the Holy Spirit. “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

Now at some point in time in current days we have transitioned from using Holy Ghost to Holy Spirit. Some translations of the Bible still use Holy Ghost. I am not sure when this transition took place. To me when I think of a ghost I either think of Casper the Friendly ghost (some of you know not of what I speak), or I think of a spooky type of scary ghost. A ghost often conjures of someone that is dead. The Holy Spirit is not dead, but is alive and well. So most often people refer to Holy Ghost as Holy Spirit. They are different ways of saying the same person.

Not here is where it gets complicated. We believe in the Trinity. Three persons, not three separate individuals. **(image)** The Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God. The Father is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Son, the Son is not the Father. Say what???? Complex, mysterious, miraculous, hard to understand. What is trying to be shown by that image is The Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is not 3 separate representations of God, but are actually 3 persons but one God. Here we need to cue the Twilight Zone music. Or at least say, "Say what?"

Three in one from the very beginning. Many often refer to the Holy Spirit coming after Jesus ascended into heaven. But in reality the 3 in 1 were there from the beginning. The Holy Spirit is mentioned many times in the Old Testament. Why even the second verse of Genesis 1 says, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." In Job it says, "But it is the Spirit in a man, the breath of the almighty, that gives him understanding." David in the Psalms says, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." (Psalm 51:11) In 1 Samuel it says, "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power." (1 Samuel 10:6-7) Why Isaiah says "they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit." An one of my favorite passages "Not by might nor power, but my Spirit says the Lord." (Zechariah 4:6)

One God yet 3 persons is so difficult to understand. Through the years there have been many analogies of the Trinity. So let's look at some of these analogies.

St. Patrick used the following analogy in the 400's in Ireland---the shamrock, the 3 leaf clover. **(image)**. Three leaves like the Triune God with 3 separate and distinct persons. Okay that kind of works.

Some have used the image of an Apple **(image)**. Skin, fruit, seeds. One apple---three parts. Three in one.

One that I have used before is this one **(image)**. Ice, water, steam. All of them are one substance...the chemicals H₂O. Solid, liquid, steam. However here theologically is where we get into difficulty...this is 3 forms of the same substance, not 3 individual persons but One God.

Whoa...deep theology. I still remember my first pastoral appointment. I was an Associate Pastor. Fresh out of seminary. In my 20's. A lady that had her doctorate came up to me...and bless her heart she did this to me all the time...she got in my sphere of my comfort zone. You know what I'm talking about. Someone that doesn't just stand safely talking to you...but kind of

gets too close....just about nose to nose. Well, anyway she approaches me and literally gets in my face and says, "Which theologians did you study in seminary?" Now friends I need to make somewhat of a disclaimer. Before and after worship services is not the best time to ask me deep theological questions or church business questions. You see...after preaching or after worship...my mind is well...mush. So as Mary Lee, excuse me Dr. xxxx came up to me...one my mind was mush, 2 I was intimidated. I tried hard to give her an answer...so I quickly thought and said something like, "Well, I studied the usually theologians uh...uh..Barth, Bultman, Moltmann, Niebuhr." I'm not sure I even mentioned these guys, I just began naming names I had heard of in seminary. I then stopped and said, "You know I studied the basic theologians but I just about had a minor in my studies and I just about studied in Practical Ministries---like Pastoral Care." She kind of "Hummppped" and walked away. I say that to say that in many ways the Pastor is the resident theologian. At the same time I have tried to be very practical in my approach. So to try to make an analogy of the trinity although it may be very practical sometimes comes against true and proper theological doctrine. So theologically it is very difficult to explain the trinity.

However, another illustration/analogy I have used is an Egg. **(image)** The shell, the white, the yoke. However again we run into the problem of these are part of one...part of one egg, but yet 3 separate items of the egg...whereas the Trinity is one God 3 separate persons.

Some have tried to use the aspect of the different roles. God the creator, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. 3 roles of one God. This would be like me saying I am a husband, a father, and a Pops (a grandfather)...did I tell you grandchild #5 is on the way in November! However, again this 3 roles one person goes against the theological doctrine of one God 3 persons, not just 3 roles of One God.

In 2007 a book came out entitled *The Shack* **(image)**. It was written by William P. Young. On the cover of that book is an endorsement by Eugene Peterson who wrote the paraphrase Bible we use, "The Message." He said this, "This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyon's *Pilgrims' Progress* did for his. It's that good." And yet when the movie came out this year people such as Chuck Colson, and Mars Hill Pastor Mark Driscoll extremely criticized it as misrepresenting God. Some in fact called the book and the movie heretical.

Now, I read the book. And Sarah and I saw the movie this year. And for the most part really enjoyed the movie. It is fiction and the theology is not necessarily doctrinally true. In fact I simply posted on my Facebook page that I went to see the move and made a positive comment about it and I had a clergy friend simply tag me and said, "Modalism." Now I got to be honest, I didn't know what Modalism was....remember I'm more into practical ministries. So I had to do some research.

Let me give a quote about Modalism that I found. (Theopedia) Modalism, also called Sabellianism, is the unorthodox belief that God is one person who has revealed himself in three forms or *modes* in contrast to the Trinitarian doctrine where God is one being eternally existing in three persons. According to Modalism, during the incarnation, Jesus was simply God acting in one mode or role, and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was God acting in a different mode.

Thus, God does not exist as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the same time. Rather, He is one person and has merely manifested himself in these three modes at various times. Modalism thus denies the basic distinctiveness and coexistence of the three persons of the Trinity.

Okay that is the theological basis of Modalism. But then again, how do you explain the Trinity. If you saw the movie you know that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were represented by 3 persons. **(image)** You have Mack in the coat, Jesus on the end, Papa to the other side of Mack and the Asian woman is Sarayu the Holy Spirit.

One of the lines I laughed at in the movie is when Mack and the three persons are sitting at the table and Mack asks them the important question, "Which one of you... [is God]?" they respond in unison, "I am."

Perhaps it is Modalism...now I don't want to steer you down the wrong road theologically. The 3 leaf clover, the apple, the ice-water-steam, the egg, the different roles I may have are simply illustrations or analogies. I believe the Shack tried to represent the different aspects of our one God in 3 persons.

Here is the bottom line. We can't adequately explain the Trinity. No illustration, no image, no analogy will ever do it justice. "In unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Some of those analogies helps me understand to some degree a little better this mystery. You see we are trying to humanly explain the divine....can't do it. It is beyond us. I do believe in one God, three persons. We will continue our series with the Presence of the Holy Spirit, the Power of the Holy Spirit, and the Purpose of the Holy Spirit.

Graduates....you have learned a lot. There is a lot you do not yet know. There is a lot of theology and things about the Bible that I don't completely comprehend, but I believe. I do one you to hear loud and clear as you head into colleges and careers....Jesus said---Be sure of this, I am with you always."

In the 4th Century The Apostle's Creed was written and used to establish the basic core beliefs of Christians. Non denominations, but Christianity. When asked what I believe...I can refer to The Apostle's Creed or paraphrase it. Will you stand as we unite in this historic confession of the Christian Faith.

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;**

**And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;**

**the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**