

**Trinity Sunday**  
**Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX**  
**4 June 2023**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

Today we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity and all three of our Lectionary readings try very hard to make a point: This is a biblical understanding of God. In the creation narrative of Genesis we see a singular creation on the first five days of creation: "Let there be light" (Day 1.) "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." (Day 2.) "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear... Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed..." (Day 3.) "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night..." (Sun and Moon, Day 4.) "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky... Let the earth bring forth living creatures..." (Day 5.) But then, we see a break in the narrative, and the narrator changes from a singular to a plural voice, "Then God said, '*Let us* make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'" (Day 6.)

We go from a singular creator to a plural creator, marking a significant break in the narrative. The creation of humanity is so important that all three Persons of the Trinity are involved, and when they create, they create in accordance to their image. "In God's image, God created them, male and female God created them."

The final blessing of the Second Letter to the Corinthians states, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." This is an interesting way of finishing this letter. Why use three persons? Why not just say, "May the Lord Jesus bless you?" Perhaps the author of the letter is saying the same thing Genesis said about the creation of men and women. The creation of a new community in the Lord Jesus is so important that all three Persons of the Trinity are involved in the blessing and protection of the Church.

Then, in the last few verses of the Gospel of Matthew, we see these three persons appear once again. Jesus orders his disciples, "Go 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." Once again, this is a strange blessing on the lips of Jesus. Why not say, "Go and make disciples in my name?" Perhaps Matthew is saying the same thing as Genesis and 2 Corinthians. The creation of men and women is so significant that the three persons of the Holy Trinity show up. The creation of the Church is so significant that the three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in this act of creation. Lastly, the mission of the Church for the world and in the world is so significant that the three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in the act of making disciples for Jesus of Nazareth.

It seems then that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity has deep biblical roots. In this doctrine we see an opposite trend in theology. With much of our theology, we see fathers of the Church and theologians at various councils taking phrases and stories from Scripture and developing sophisticated, complicated, sometimes strange doctrines, which were then mandated as crucial tenants of the faith. They often went from simple echoes in Scripture to complicated, multi-part, and sometimes outright unbelievable doctrines. Think for example about the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. We go from the idea of Mary being a virgin at the conception of Jesus to the idea that she was completely pure and undefiled. Then we say, "If she was completely pure and undefiled, was she ever affected by original sin? Was she born with the stain of this sin?" Then to uphold the first premise (she was 'pure') we say, "Therefore she was born without sin, which means that original sin did not apply to her. She was conceived without sin. She was immaculate even at conception." There is absolutely no proof of this in Scripture, but the Church made a giant leap in order to make clear what to them appeared unclear or obscure (How does the doctrine of Original Sin apply to Mary.)

The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity was not created by the theologians of the Church. Scripture seems to be saying that the authors of Scripture perceived that God sometimes acts in three very different ways, as though God is three different persons in one indivisible entity. There are times when God acts as a parental figure, there are times when God acts as a second person we call "the Christ" who shows up as Messiah and liberator of the world, and there are times when God acts as a spiritual force so powerful that it can only come from this parental figure and this second person we call "Christ." Scripture made no attempt to explain how one indivisible unite shows up in three different persons, according to the Biblical Canon, this remains a mystery. The Church has tried to understand this mystery for over 2,000 years, yet we are no closer to understanding this great mystery than when we first started our efforts.

Yet, it is very clear that true Christian faith is a Trinitarian faith. Without a belief in the Trinity, no group or denomination can be truly called Christian. This is one of our difficulties with Mormonism. Their refusal to accept the doctrine of the Holy Trinity places them outside of the Christian family. This has been the consensus of most Christian theologians and scholars for over a hundred years. To be truly and authentic Christians, we must believe that God choses to interact with God's creation through the acts of three different persons, yet we must also believe that God is One and can not be less or more than One being. How do we understand this mystery?

To answer this question, let me go back to that last passage in Matthew 28:16-20. "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore Go...' Notice two important details here. First, Matthew tells us that there were eleven disciples. Judas had by now killed himself, so the group that at first was perfect (the number 12 signifies the twelve tribes, which means complete, as it should be, perfect)

now is an imperfect group of eleven. Not quite perfect, not quite complete, not quite as it should be. The great commission is given to an imperfect Church, a church that will never be what it should be on this side of the River Jordan. A group that will forever try and fail to live up perfectly to the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth and to his great commission. This is very telling.

The second detail I want you to notice is the expression, “When they saw him, they worshipped him; *but* some doubted.” The Greek work for “but” can also be translated as “And.” Theologians have refused to translate this as “They worship him *and* some doubted” because to them it seemed impossible to believe and to doubt at the same time, but perhaps faith and doubts are bit binary principles in perpetual conflict with each other. Perhaps faith and doubt go hand in hand. Perhaps there are ideas and principles we don’t quite understand and perhaps this is okay. Perhaps, we are destined to look through a glass dimly (as Paul states) as long as we are on this side of creation. Perhaps we can accept the doctrine of the Holy Trinity without having to understand it fully. Perhaps we don’t have to mandate, under the penalty of hell, that we understand this great mystery. Perhaps we don’t have to order all Christians to accept without question what some theologian or dogma has said about this. Perhaps we can leave people’s doubts about the Trinity exist side by side with their faith in a God who is a wonderful mystery.

According to the biblical canon, life begins and ends in mystery. We cannot fully understand it, but you don’t need to see air to benefit from its life giving power. We don’t have to see electricity to be able to plug our phones in a socket to charge our phones. There are realities we know exist, even if we don’t know how they exist. Our faith is a faith comfortable with doubt and comfortable with mystery. In fact, I am always suspicious with a Church that seems to have easy answers to complicated questions. There are answers to your doubts and questions that make God incredible small, reducible to our human understanding. There are answers that are outright demeaning to human reason. (“Roma locuta, causa finite est.” Or the famous, “Il Papa ha parlato, la questione e’ definitivamente chiusa!” (Rome has spoken, the issue is final. Or, the Pope has spoken, the question definitively settled!)) And there are answers so incredibly complex that they seek to deny the reality of our human imperfection.

Our Anglican Faith is a faith seeking understanding. Ours is a grappling faith that questions, wonders, and ultimately accepts our limitations in understanding. We know we look through a glass dimly, but we also know that one day we will see God face to face, even as he sees us face to face. And then, we will understand the wonderful reality of God as God is. Until then, let us continue to affirm our Trinitarian faith, not because we fully understand it, but because we are comfortable with mystery and because we believe that one day we will see God face to face. Amen!