



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
on
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Living Hope."
(Pentecost, 2026)

"The Heart of Hope." *The Trinity*. Text(s): *Various Texts*.

☐ **Day #1—Monday, June 1st. Read: Matthew 28.16-20. –Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

In our Church Year, yesterday was the *Sunday of the Holy Trinity*. Last Sunday, we explored the significance of Pentecost, and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit to the church. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ to redeem and reconcile us to Himself, promising to live within us and give us *new life* through the power of the Holy Spirit—this is the Trinitarian reality of the Christian faith! This week, we expand on this Trinitarian understanding of our new life in Christ. The central dogma of Christian theology is the truth that the One God exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, we read this description of the Holy Trinity:

Though the word "Trinity," first used in its Greek form *τριάς* [*trias*] by Theophilus of Antioch (c. AD 180), is not found in Scripture, Christian theologians have seen adumbrations of the doctrine in the biblical narratives; in the OT, for example, the appearance of the three men to Abraham (Gen. 18) was held by the Fathers to foreshadow the revelation of the threefold nature of God. In the NT the most influential text was the reference to the three Persons in the baptismal formula at the end of Mt. (28:19), but there are other passages held to have Trinitarian overtones, such as the Pauline benediction of 2 Cor. 13:14. From the biblical language concerning Father, Son (or Logos), and Spirit, Trinitarian doctrine developed, as the Church's expansion led to the need for reflection, confession, and dialogue.¹

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a *proscriptive* truth in the Bible—it is a *descriptive* truth. The Trinity is first and foremost a profound mystery. Christian theology has retained this understanding of the godhead chiefly because this is Scripture's revelation about God! The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to explicate the divine *transcendence* (God is wholly other and above His creatures and creation), *and* God's *immanence* (God is love and desires to be a part of and with His creation and creatures)! According to Lutheran theologian, Ted Peters (my theology professor ☺):

Theologically, however, we must say that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three distinct, divine, rational beings, three subjects, or three separate selves. Nor are they distinct parts of a single divine self, which, in its oneness, hovers unseen behind or above the separate faces. There are not three personalities in God, although we certainly might speak of a personality of God. The one God is fully present and active in each and all modes of being and action; yet God is not distinguishable except in one or another of these modes of being and action. One or another of the faces is required to identify the one God.²

Question/Reflect: "Jesus gives us the tools to make disciples: Baptism and His teaching... [The Church is to] ...baptize... them in the name...."Name" is singular, followed by the threefold naming of the divine persons. This illustrates the doctrine of the Holy Trinity... Those baptized in the name of the Father have God as their Father; baptized in the name of the Son, they receive all the benefits of the Son's redeeming act; baptized in the name of the Spirit, they receive the life-giving, life-sustaining power and presence of the Spirit. Christian Baptism is founded on this institution."³

1 F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, Eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2 Ted Peters. *God: The World's Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

3 *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

□ **Day #2—Tuesday, June 2nd. Read: Romans 11.33-36. —Examine: The Text and its Message.**

Today, we hear from Martin Luther in one of his sermons for the Sunday of the Holy Trinity. Using *Romans 11.33-36* as his preaching text, Luther comments:

This festival requires us to instruct the people in the dogma of the Holy Trinity, and to strengthen both memory and faith concerning it. This is the reason why we take up the subject once more. Without proper instruction and a sound foundation in this regard, other dogmas cannot be rightly and successfully treated. The other festivals of the year present the Lord God clothed in his works and miracles. For instance: on Christmas we celebrate his incarnation; on Easter his resurrection from the dead; on Whitsunday the gift of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Christian Church. Thus all the other festivals present the Lord in the guise of a worker of one thing or another. But this Trinity Festival discloses him to us as he is in himself. Here we see him apart from whatever guise assumed, from whatever work done, solely in his divine essence. We must go beyond and above all reason, leaving behind the evidence of created things, and hear only God's own testimony concerning himself and his inner essence; otherwise we shall remain unenlightened.⁴

Luther's insistence is that, while for humankind, the doctrine of the Trinity might be confusing or illogical, this limited, human understanding only points to God's inestimable ways and being. In other words, how can mere human beings understand completely a holy, supernatural being that transcends our minds? As one commentator put it rather simply, this would be similar to "an ant understanding quantum physics." Or, better said by Luther:

Upon this subject [the Trinity] the foolishness of God and the wisdom of the world conflict. God's declaration that he is one God in three distinct persons, the world looks upon as wholly unreasonable and foolish; and the followers of mere reason, when they hear it, regard every one that teaches or believes it as no more than a fool. Therefore this article has been assailed continually, from the times of the apostles and the fathers down to the present day, as history testifies...O shameless reason! How can we poor, miserable mortals grasp this mystery of the Trinity? we who do not understand the operation of our own physical powers—speech, laughter, sleep, things whereof we have daily experience? Yet we would, untaught by the Word of God, guided merely by our fallible head, pronounce upon the very nature of God. Is it not supreme blindness for man, when he is unable to explain the most insignificant physical operation daily witnessed in his own body, to presume to understand something above and beyond the power of reason to comprehend, something whereof only God can speak, and to rashly affirm that Christ is not God?⁵

Question/Reflect: "In ways beyond our understanding, God has acted in mercy to bring salvation to Jews and Gentiles. Human beings cannot exchange roles with God, presuming to sit in judgment of Him. But we in whom His Spirit dwells praise Him for His inexhaustible kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [Pray]: To You alone, O triune Lord, belongs all glory forever. Amen."⁶

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, June 3rd. Read: Mark 1.9-11. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

As has already been discussed, while the word *Trinity*, does not appear in the Bible, the understanding and doctrine of the Triune God is found throughout the Biblical writings. Biblical Scholar C. Meeks describes three, Biblical affirmations that informs the doctrine of the Trinity:

(1). There is only one God (Deut 6:4; Isa 43:10; 46:9; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4; Jas 2:19). (2). The one whom Jesus called "Father" (John 6:27; 1 Cor 8:6), the incarnate Son (Matt 1:23; John 1:1; Rom 9:5; Col 2:9; Titus 2:13-14; Heb 1:1-3), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-27; 2 Cor 3:7-18) all possess the necessary attributes of this God. (3). These three are not identical; they interact with one another and their identities are constituted with respect to one another (Matt 3:16-17; 12:32; 17:5; Luke 3:21-22; 4:1; John 15:26; 16:7-16; 2 Cor 13:14). They act distinctly but in concert with one another (Gen 1:1-3; John 1:1-3; 2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2-3).⁷

One of the Scriptural foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity is found in the accounts of Jesus' baptism. In this moment, Jesus the Son is being baptized; the Spirit descends upon Him (in the form of a dove); and the Father speaks words of blessing over His Son. Another key text in the Gospels is the account of the Transfiguration. Again, as Meeks describes, in the Transfiguration of Jesus...

4 Martin Luther. "Trinity Sunday (Romans 11:33-36)." In J. N. Lenker, *Luther's Epistle Sermons: Trinity Sunday to Advent* (Minneapolis: The Luther Press, 1909).

5 Ibid.

6 *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

7 C. Meeks. "Trinity." In, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

The Synoptic Gospels (and also 2 Pet 1:16–18) describe a miraculous revelation to three of Jesus’ disciples: Peter, James the son of Zebedee, and John (Matt 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). Elijah and Moses appear and converse with Jesus, and Jesus is not only transfigured in glorious brilliance before the disciples, but a voice declares from heaven, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him” (Luke 9:35). The disciples do not fully understand the event, but Christians reading the accounts would perceive that Jesus is again directly and powerfully linked to God the Father.⁸

Question/Reflect: “The Father declares Jesus is His Son as the Spirit descends on Jesus. Jesus’ status as God’s Son makes Him a target of Satan’s assaults (1:12–13). This same dynamic continues in the lives of God’s children today, as Satan does all that he can to tempt the baptized. Yet, our own Baptism joins us to Christ and clothes us with His righteousness. [Pray]: Lord, You humbly stood in our stead when baptized by John and thereby gave us a share in Your life, death, and resurrection. Let us therefore celebrate our place in God’s family, obeying the Father, dwelling richly in the Spirit, and ever following You. Amen.”⁹

□ **Day #4--Thursday, June 4th. Read: Hebrews 1.1-4.— Explore: The background to this text(s).**

We have repeatedly said that the presence of the Trinity is found throughout the Scriptural narrative. Here are some further examples:

John 16:13–15 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you....

John 17:21–24 ...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me...

1 Corinthians 8:6 ...yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Hebrews 1:1–3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...

It was from these texts, as well as many others that the early church developed and articulated this core doctrine of the Trinity for the sake of Christian theology and good order.

In the early years of the church, various understandings about the person of Jesus, as well as His relationship to God the Father and the Spirit, were being taught, some of which were not consistent with the Biblical witness. The early church leaders and Fathers found it necessary to convene Ecumenical Councils that would ultimately mediate and establish *orthodox* (literally, “right-words, right-teaching), Christian doctrine for the purpose of the church’s witness and life together.

Participants in the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325 developed a creed that reflected the orthodox views of the Church regarding the revelation of God the Trinity as *ὁμοούσιος* (*homoousios*, “of one substance”). The First Council of Constantinople in AD 381 would later expand the creed to its most lasting form, which is still used in worship today. The three main articles of the creed assert belief in one God, who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and describe how these three persons are related. Even this creed would not prove universal for the Church, however, as East and West eventually divided partly over the issue of the Spirit’s procession: The West held that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*), a statement that was added to the creed at the anti-Arian Council of Toledo in 589 but was not present in the original Greek text.¹⁰

Question/Reflect: “Jesus, through whom the Father created all things, and by whose Word all things are sustained, clearly reveals the gracious will of the Father to us. Although Jesus is heavenly like the angels, He is no mere creature. He is the firstborn Son of the Father, who shares with us all that the Father has. He frees us to receive God’s ministry, including the ministry given through the angels. [Pray]: Lord Jesus, thank You for creating and sustaining me. By Your Word, keep me in true faith, that I may inherit salvation. Amen.”¹¹

8 Ibid.

9 *The Lutheran Study Bible.*

10 Ibid.

11 *The Lutheran Study Bible.*

□ **Day #5— Friday, June 5th. Read: John 14.9-11.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

One of the concepts used to describe the inner-life of the Trinity, developed out of the Eastern tradition in Christian history, is the Greek term, *perichoresis*, which literally defined means, “To dance around.” Attributed to John of Damascus, *perichoresis* describes:

...the co-indwelling, co-inhering, and mutual interpenetration [of the Trinity]. Alistair McGrath writes that it “allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of a “community of being,” in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them.” The doctrine is based on John’s Gospel that “*the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father.*”¹²

Again, Ted Peters describes this Trinitarian relationship:

Christ with respect to us is called God; with respect to the Father, Son. Again, the Father with respect to us is called God; with respect to the Son, Father. Finally, the Spirit in respect to us is called God; with respect to the other two persons, Spirit.¹³

In affirming the unity of the Trinity, we also affirm the work of the Trinity in the world: It is God *the Father* who has created us and all that exists. God sent Jesus *the Son* to save us and all creation. After the Son’s ascension back to the Father, the Father and the Son sent *the Holy Spirit* to apply the work of the Son to our lives, sanctifying us until Jesus returns!

Question/Reflect: “Through His death and resurrection, Christ went to prepare a place for us in heaven, where we will dwell with God forever. The true God cannot be known apart from Jesus Christ. Because of Christ’s work, we can know the Father and enter His eternal presence. [Pray]: O risen Lord, with great anticipation I long for my home in heaven. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.”¹⁴

□ **Day #6-Saturday, June 6th. Read: 2 Corinthians 13.14.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

If there is a practical, primary understanding and reflection that flows from the doctrine of the Trinity, it is that *God is love*—God is a *community* of reciprocal *giving* and *receiving love* within His very being and is therefore, *relational*! The Triune God is the source of all that exists and keeps all things in existence. The Triune God is a communion of Persons. Consequently, we can believe that the world is not a random, series of events, but is *personal*. What brought creation into being was not an impersonal force like Evolution or fate. What moves the world is the Father of Jesus, the Father who is like Jesus, and who moves the world by the Spirit of Jesus. As we end this week and our exploration of the Trinity, let’s summarize and clarify our focus:

1. ***God is One.*** The God of the OT is the same God of the NT. His offer of salvation in the OT receives a fuller revelation in the NT in a way that is not different but more complete. The doctrine of the Trinity does not abandon the monotheistic faith of Israel.
2. ***God has three distinct ways of being in the redemptive event, yet He remains an undivided unity.*** That God the Father imparts Himself to mankind through Son and Spirit without ceasing to be Himself is at the very heart of the Christian faith. A compromise in either the absolute sameness of the Godhead or the true diversity reduces the reality of salvation.
3. ***The primary way of grasping the concept of the Trinity is through the threefold participation in salvation.*** The approach of the NT is not to discuss the essence of the Godhead, but the particular aspects of the revelatory event that includes the definitive presence of the Father in the person of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.
4. ***The doctrine of the Trinity is an absolute mystery.*** It is primarily known, not through speculation, but through experiencing the act of grace through personal faith.¹⁵

Question/Reflect: The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that the world (you) were created *by and for love*. How does this change your understanding of God, your relationship with God?

12 wikipedia.org/wiki/Perichoresis

13 Peters. *God: The World’s Future*.

14 *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

15 J.M. Henry. “Trinity.” In, *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).