

Sermon for Trinity Sunday Year C 2025
Threefold Known and Unknown

Trinity Sunday or the Sunday of the Holy Trinity if you prefer, is the only Sunday of the church year that is dedicated to a theological belief or doctrine.

Christians are monotheists—

that is we believe that there is only one God
(the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob)

and yet—we also confess that that one God is a trinity or triune.

The ancient creeds are the church's best effort to articulate, what, when all is said and done,

something utterly beyond the capability of human language to express.

But since when did that ever stop us mortals from trying?

Of course, human language is all we have, as inadequate as it may be.

Language is our only frame of reference for speaking about our human experience of God—even with the language of music, we end up speaking the unspeakable in words too small for such an undertaking.

Bottom line, God is God and we humans are not God.

It's kind of like wrapping presents.

You know those wonderful neat, handy gift wraps
with folds perfectly creased—

straight, uniform and square

so you can match up the pattern on the paper.

Everything tied up perfectly with a beautiful bow on top?

Well, the Trinity isn't like that.

The Trinity is more like trying to wrap a bicycle or a rake or one of those carpet covered cat condos.

Can you gift wrap those things? Sure!

And from far enough away without your glasses on . . .
it looks, okay—ish.

After all, it's covered.

But it isn't all neat and tidy.

The Trinity is more like that.

And our creeds are kind of like that—attempting to wrap things up about the Trinity in a nice, neat package.

And yet . . . this is God and as much as we would like to, we just cannot wrap God up in nice, neat packages.

It all gets out of shape by the time we get to the second article of the creeds—the part about Jesus, being born in a certain time and place and though he is God’s “eternally begotten” Son he is also the son of Mary.

According to the second article, God is “incarnate.”

God, at a certain point in human history, became human and remains so. The miracle of the Incarnation was not a clever disguise.

Neither was it a temporary state of affairs.

God became flesh. God remains flesh.

God will forever abide in human flesh—so much so that when Philip pleads with Jesus “to show us the Father” Jesus replies that, in seeing him, Philip has seen the Father.

To say, as we do, that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father is to say that Jesus is how God remains fully present to creation.

Jesus is all the God there is.

Then there is the Holy Spirit . . . the one who takes the fullness of God revealed in Jesus and declares it to Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus has much to teach us—too much for any one human lifetime.

(Though, there again, there are those who think they know it all.)

That is why Jesus continues to guide, teach and inspire his church through the presence of the Spirit in its midst.

That is why the Apostle Paul can declare to the church in Corinth that it is the Body of Christ.

This is not just a metaphor for Paul.

The church is Christ Jesus inviting the world to be reconciled to its Creator and to the divided factions within itself.

As one of my favorite seminary professors is fond of saying,
“God is not through speaking. We dare not place periods where God intends only a comma.”

The creeds are not the last word on everything to be said about God.
That same professor used to say that theology (which is talking about God) is learning to say “the least wrong thing about God.”

Which is a reminder that “now we see in a glass dimly”—
so we are apt to say many very wrong things
about God from time to time.

Such very wrong things usually attempt to wrap God up in a neat box,
put a period or even an exclamation point on what has said,
and generally turns the good news into bad news, especially for others.
Whenever you begin thinking that God is against the ones you are
against, you are probably not thinking about God.
You’re doing a good bit of projection and you have made an idol.

So the creeds take us as far as our human languages can go
into the mystery of God’s self.

Indeed, as we have seen, they take us to the point
where human language begins to falter.

Nevertheless, paradoxically, the Spirit calls us to go further, to keep
gazing into the mystery, to seek Jesus in the here and now, to push
against the boundaries of our understanding (and our misunderstanding).

One of our great church fathers and theologians
was Augustine of Hippo.

He is famous for his writings and sermons and for this saying which I’m
sure you’ve heard before:

Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in you.

This comes from Augustine’s book, *Confessions*, which is his
autobiographical account of his life and conversion to Christianity.

I highly recommend it if you haven’t read it.

It’s short and fascinating . . .

and even surprising when you hear what Augustine got up to
before he was baptized and became a priest and bishop.

As it turns out, the gospel lesson for this Trinity Sunday was pivotal for Augustine's reflections on the Trinity where he writes of God's Triune self as love.

Of course, love always seeks an object beyond itself.

If it did not, it would not be love.

Thus, God's essence is the mutual love between the Father and the Son mediated by the Holy Spirit.

Augustine asserts that the perfection of God's being is God's total freedom. God has no need to create and did not create the universe out of boredom or loneliness.

God has eternally known love and the joys of communion within the Godhead. Creation adds nothing to God.

And yet . . . in another sense, creation was necessary.

Love is always expanding, always seeking new objects, always transcending every limit.

When God said, "let there be . . ." God was making space for another, for something or someone not God.

That is what love always does.

It makes room in the heart for another.

It generously gives another space to be who and what they are without compulsion, coercion or threats.

So, perhaps, rather than asserting that God made the universe out of nothing, it would be least wrong to say that God made the universe out of love.

There is a legend dating from the Middle Ages that goes as follows:

While Augustine was working on his book *On the Trinity*,

he was walking by the seaside one day,

meditating on the difficult problem of how God could be three Persons at once.

He came upon a little child.

The child had dug a little hole in the sand,

and with a small spoon or seashell

was scooping water from the sea into the small hole.

Augustine watched him for a while and finally asked the child what he was doing. The child answered that he would scoop all the water from the sea and pour it into the little hole in the sand. 'What?' Augustine said. 'That is impossible. Obviously, the sea is too large and the hole too small.' 'Indeed,' said the child, 'but I will sooner draw all the water from the sea and empty it into this hole than you will succeed in penetrating the mystery of the Holy Trinity with your limited understanding.' Augustine turned away in amazement and when he looked back the child had disappeared.

Even the great Augustine of Hippo who was a great theologian and a great man of letters could not plumb the depths of God. And yet . . . I think Augustine was onto something when he said the Trinity is about love.

As the poet William Butler Yeats once observed about love that
*There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it,
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away
And the shadows eaten the moon.*

So we do not have a God that fits neatly in a box, but we do have a God who is love . . . love and grace and mercy that we can never come to the end of. We have a God who in his passion for us and the world, enters into our suffering and fears, our loneliness and pain, and gathers us together as one—with the Trinity and with one another—to experience faith, hope and above all love. It's never neat and tidy and tied up in a box with a beautiful bow. But it is a great mystery, messy and beautiful and not fully known. May God grant us grace to confess the least wrong thing about our God of Love.