

## Trinity Sunday (Year C)

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*Romans 5:1-5*

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

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1 + 1 + 1 = 1. Makes sense, right?

The Trinity is a holy mystery. And yet, we profess it every Sunday. In fact, we sang it together just a few minutes ago. "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty...God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." In a few minutes from now, we will profess it in the Trinitarian formula of the Apostles' Creed. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty...and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord....I believe in the Holy Spirit." Additionally, I will end this sermon as I do every Sunday by saying, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The Holy Trinity is a doctrine that we affirm every Sunday but rarely take the time to explore and wonder about its spiritual depth. It is important for us to be reminded that we do not "believe in" the doctrine of the Trinity (or any other doctrine, for that matter). We believe in *God*, who we know through the holy mystery of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

The first step in exploring the Trinity is to affirm that it is not our responsibility to "understand" it. At its deepest and truest sense, the Doctrine of the Trinity is a wonder to be held in awe rather than a scientific formula to be picked apart methodically. At the end of the day, 1 + 1 + 1 = 1 still does not make sense to our post-renaissance world. And perhaps it is the best that way. Perhaps that allows us to open ourselves up to a wonderful mystery that compels our imaginations.

Although the most traditional way of speaking of the Trinity is to say "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," I will refer to the Trinity in terms of "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer" in this sermon. I will do so for two reasons. First of all, the language of "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer" is gender neutral and, therefore, does not refer to God in explicitly masculine terms. Secondly, I personally prefer this language often because it within itself describes what each "person" of the Trinity does. This is because we know God because of what God does.

Therefore, let us start with God the Creator.

It takes nothing more than a beautiful walk during sunset on one of the many beaches here at Shelter Island to be reminded of the breathtaking beauty of God's creation. Even in the dead of winter, this island has a quiet, still beauty to it. Most of us gaze upon the natural order and have some innate

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Shirley Guthrie for this reminder from *Christian Doctrine*.

sense that it must have come from somewhere. Our biblical narrative gives us rich language to describe God's role as Creator. A quick glance through the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis give us a narrative description of God's breath moving over the waters and bringing life to all of created order. Over a span of 6 days, God created everything that was, and is, and is to come. God created every deer, turkey, squirrel, and rabbit that inhabit our yards. God created every human being and every mountain, valley, and stream. Before the beginning of time, we believe that God already had in mind the oddly shaped island that would come to be known as Shelter Island.

It is important that we note that God the Creator has not retired. Rather, the work of this person of the Trinity is ongoing and never-ending. Indeed, God the Creator is *still* creating even to this day. In fact, the other two persons of the Trinity that we will explore here shortly are, themselves, evidence of God's continuing creation in the world.

God the Creator (for me, at least) conjures up images of an elderly woman sitting at a pottery wheel, an architect creating masterful blueprints for an intricate building, a child building a fantasy town with their legos or Lincoln Logs, or perhaps an Osprey gathering sticks and branches for their nest along the causeway to Ram Island.

This Creator is responsible for dividing the waters of the Red Sea, for gathering the waters in the epic flood, for placing the rainbow in the sky afterwards, for setting into motion everything that was and is and is to come. This Creator is the master conductor, whose artful waves bring order where there once was chaos. This person of the Trinity, however, does not like to create alone. Instead, God the Creator needs a little help from God the Redeemer.

God the Redeemer, also sometimes referred to as the "Second Person" of the Trinity, we know in the body and being of Jesus Christ. Now, many of us here might be tempted to think of Jesus as beginning with his birth roughly 2,000 year ago in a manger. However, Jesus is really much older than that! Theologically speaking, we believe that Jesus is co-eternal with the other two persons of the Trinity. That's a fancy way of saying that there has never been a time when Jesus was "not." Jesus, as God the Redeemer, was present in the very beginning. We just didn't know him in the flesh until he was born a little baby in that manger with Mary and Joseph.

God the Redeemer, came to save the world that had strayed from creation's intended path. However, since we believe that Jesus is co-eternal with God, this means that God's intent for creation *from the get go* was for it (you and me!) to be redeemed. God the Redeemer came in the flesh known as a man called Jesus Christ.

God the Redeemer (for me, at least) conjures up images of the elderly father welcoming home his wayward son, a lamb taking on the sacrifice for the people's sins, a mother hen protecting her chicks, or perhaps an advocacy group speaking out on behalf of those without a voice.

God the Redeemer is responsible for coming in the flesh, becoming "God With Us," for removing every barrier that existed between us and God, for preaching and teaching and healing, for dying for our sins and taking on the burden we could not shoulder, for dying and then rising from the grave to defeat death and snatch us from the grasp of Satan! Like God the Creator, neither is God the Redeemer on vacation. Rather, the redemptive act of Jesus continues each and every day. Which brings us to the "Third" and final person of the trinity, God the Sustainer, otherwise known as the Holy Spirit.

Of the three persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is likely the one we are currently thinking about the most because, after all, Pentecost Sunday was just one week ago. God the Sustainer, as the Apostle

Paul puts it in today's reading, is the love that is poured into our hearts by God. The Holy Spirit, who is also co-eternal with God the Creator, has been gifted to us by God the Redeemer. The Holy Spirit binds us together as we follow Jesus Christ in the name of God. The Holy Spirit brings wisdom to our hearts as we read scripture. The Holy Spirit guides us as we embark on this blessed journey known as discipleship. The Holy Spirit comes upon us as a holy dove, gifting us with peace and courage to fulfill our tasks.

God the Sustainer (for me, at least) conjures up images of a steady rain after a long drought, the warmth of a hug from a loved one you haven't seen in a long time, the companionship of someone willing to sit with you in silence while you grieve, a grandmother or grandfather who prepares a home-cooked meal for a hungry grandchild, or perhaps a spider weaving an intricate web by the light of the moon.

God the Sustainer is responsible for that unspoken voice of comfort in a sea of pain. God the Sustainer is who brings us together to love one another as God the Redeemer taught us to. God the Sustainer is responsible for the tongues of flame appearing over the disciples' heads and the very banners we see hanging above us today. God the Sustainer binds all things together in love.

Together, God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer are quite a dynamic trio! And yet, together, "they" are one God. Like I said,  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ .

At the end of the day, Trinity Sunday is really an occasion for us to celebrate the *many* names we have in scripture to refer to God. Some of us may gravitate to "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Others may prefer "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer." Yet another option is "Creator, Savior, and Life-Renewer." The truth is, the Bible is filled with words to describe God.

Thomas Troeger, in his hymn "Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud," explores new (and old) ways of describing the Trinity. In fact, I would invite each and every one of you to go ahead and turn to our next hymn, hymn number 11.

In this hymn, you will note that there are, appropriately, three verses. The first verse explores descriptions of God the Creator. Likewise, the second verse explores God the Redeemer, and the third, God the Sustainer. All three verses are bound together by a common refrain: "May the church at prayer recall that no single holy name but the truth behind them all is the God whom we proclaim."

As you go about this week, and you pray to God, I encourage you to choose one of these images in this hymn to expand your vocabulary of the Triune God. As we sing this hymn, seek out the image that resonates with you and use it in your prayers this week.

And may this Trinity Sunday be a reminder to you that the One God in Three Persons is a holy mystery that defies all explanation. May you be reminded that no single metaphor for God is, by itself, expansive enough to hold the magnificence of God's truth and love.

In the name of God our "Source, Shepherd, and Stillness".<sup>2</sup> Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> With thanks to Thomas Troeger for his use of these terms in his hymn "Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud"