



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

May 31, 2026 - Trinity Sunday: [Genesis 1:1-2:4a](#); [2 Corinthians 13:11-13](#); [Matthew](#)

[28:16-20](#)

Dihydrogen monoxide. I have received special training from the Coast Guard to help protect people from dying as a result of exposure to this chemical. Dihydrogen monoxide is necessary for life but can be fatal if just a small amount is inhaled. Pure forms of it are increasingly rare and some people expect that future wars will be fought over di-hydrogen monoxide rather than oil. Dihydrogen monoxide is actually the first thing that scientists look for when probes land on the moon and on other planets. Dihydrogen monoxide - H₂O - is incredibly important for humans. On this Trinity Sunday it is also a wonderful metaphor for human understanding of God.

We know H₂O in three forms: its solid form as ice; its liquid form as water; and its gaseous form as steam. This winter New Yorkers were reacquainted with water as a solid. If you think of how glaciers carved Long Island Sound and left the sand and erratic boulders that make up our landscape, you begin to understand the power, the creative power of the solid form of water. In ice and snow, we have an image of God the father, the creator. We are even more familiar with H₂O as water. While humans can survive for a reasonable time without food, without water we quickly dry up and die. With water, we can be quickly revived. While water as a solid is creative and powerful, water as a liquid gives life. Here we have a symbol for God the son, the redeemer. The third form of water is as a gas, as steam. From railroad engines to giant turbines, steam has long been a source of power and energy. This, of course, brings to mind the Holy Spirit whose coming we celebrated last week, who is the God experienced in our lives as we gather together in community and in church. Solid, liquid, gas – each form of water is different, each is essential, each is a unique way of experiencing exactly the same thing we know as H₂O. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each person of the Godhead is different, each is essential, each is a unique way of describing the same thing, which we know as God.

The Trinity allows us to experience God in a multitude of ways. If you are spiritual but not religious, the Trinity is for you. If you find God in the mountains and the forests, on the water or the ocean, in a moonlit starry night, the Trinity is for you. If you find God in relationships with others, in healing of wounds, or in helping those in need, the Trinity is for you. If you find God in the beauty of art and music or the mystical silence of meditation and prayer, the Trinity is for you. Despite the patriarchal language, the Trinity even opens up gender possibilities for God. In the Bible, the Wisdom of God is referred to as feminine.

Feminist scholars see Wisdom as the embodiment of the Holy Spirit and use the “she” pronoun to refer to the Holy Spirit in the Creed. Others see Jesus (or “Sophia,” the Greek word for Wisdom) as the embodiment of Wisdom and the feminine embodiment of God. As seen in these examples, the Trinity is not about rigid belief. It is about God being in a relationship with God’s self and us being in relationship with God in a diversity of ways and a diversity of places and in a diversity of times and experiences in our lives.

The Doctrine of the Trinity says that God the Father is God, God the Son is God, and God the Holy Spirit is God - three in one and one in three. This solves the question of the uniqueness of Christ by saying that anyone who has experienced God (or the Spirit) has actually experienced Jesus... and that anyone who has experienced Jesus (or the Spirit) has actually experienced God. The Doctrine of the Trinity even makes the atonement a little more palatable, saying that on the cross, God didn’t sacrifice his son but sacrificed himself.

This is pretty powerful stuff. The problem is that neither the scriptures - nor Jesus himself - are in agreement with the equality that the Trinity suggests. The Gospel of John declares that the Son and the Father. In the other gospels, however, Jesus refers to God in a subordinate way. As a result of this, some Christians - following a man from a school of thinkers from Antioch named Arius - came to see Jesus as a kind of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Pope Francis and Pope Leo all tied together: a holy person and a prophet; but still fully human. Others - including a school of thinkers from Alexandria and St Nicholas of Christmas fame - disagreed and proclaimed Jesus as divine. It took more than 300 years - and the push of the Roman emperor himself - for the Bishops to gather at Nicaea and say that both sides were correct, that Jesus was both human AND divine at the same time. (The Council of Nicaea wasn’t enough. More than 100 years later the bishops met at the Council of Chalcedon to wrestle with the same questions.) I myself am mixed. I am deeply moved by the idea of Jesus as the Word of God at the beginning of creation, the light and light of the universe. I also see the scriptures in which Jesus seems to refer to God in a hierarchical way. While the repetition of the creed and trinitarian blessings and prayers projects certainty, none of this is clear. Digging into the Doctrine of the Trinity leads us into what Buddhists would call a state of not-knowing, which in their tradition is actually the first step to spiritual awakening, intimacy, and wisdom. Orthodox Christians reach the same conclusion by declaring that the Trinity is a holy mystery. Mystery isn’t bad. Mystery is a sign of a deeper, inquisitive faith. Mystery invites us into deeper relationships with others and with God, modeled on God’s relationship with God’s self.

This is all a little bit heady. Let me bring it back down by looking at the Trinity not just as a model for God but for our relationships with one another. If Jesus is both human and divine, if God is the ultimate example of unity and diversity, could not those same things be true about us? This week Pope Leo released an encyclical called *Magnifica Humanitas*. Though reported as a reflection on Artificial Intelligence, *Magnifica Humanitas* is, as its name implies, more a celebration of humanity and the divine spark that we all share. *Magnifica Humanitas* calls us to remember what it means to be fully human and made in the image of God at the same time, and to treat one another as if both are true. None of this is new. Our own baptismal vows call us to seek and serve Christ in all people, to love

our neighbor, to strive for justice and peace, and to respect the dignity of every human being. *Magnifica Humanitas* asks us to put these things in action - even and especially in the midst of everything going on. The Trinity says that when we do those things we are serving one another. The Trinity says that when we do those things we are serving God.

Trinity Sunday is not just here to help us understand and experience God in a multiplicity of relationships and a multiplicity of ways. It is also here to help us do the same thing with ourselves.