

J.j. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY IS CODE FOR THE GOSPEL  
Homily for Trinity Sunday, 3 June, A.D. 2012  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

ATHANASIAN CREED (Quicumque Vult)

Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.  
Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.  
Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity,  
neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.  
*[This creed continues for a page and a half.]*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of the Trinity is code for the gospel.  
Do you know that this Sunday, Trinity Sunday, is the only Sunday in the Church Year  
named after a doctrine?

It is; all the other Sundays are named for events or people -- our faith is based on  
historical facts.

So what about this doctrine, then? How will it fill my needs today?

We come here today with:

- our memories;
- our hopes;
- our disappointments;
- our anger;
- our fears;
- our sadnesses; and
- our joys.

We think about these now as we present ourselves before our God in worship.

The first thing to notice about this doctrine of the Trinity is that we are still dealing  
with historical facts:

**Part 1, God Has Revealed Himself as Three in One, a Trinity**

**Fact a.** The Holy Scriptures reveal God as three Divine Persons in one Divine Essence.

**Fact b.** Our three Ecumenical Creeds and the Augsburg Confession confess the  
Trinity.

**Fact c.** The substance of our time/space universe is made up of a trinity of trinities!

**Fact a.** The OT Lesson today gives us a look into heaven, and there, above the high &  
lofty throne, the seraphs call to one another a *trishagion*: "Holy, Holy, Holy."

It is the same song we will sing in just a few minutes in the Eucharistic Prayer.

Three times holy -- the OT has numerous hints that God is both One and Three.

The great *Sh'ma* states: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!"

In our second reading, St. Paul names the three Persons of the Godhead.

Led by the Spirit (Third Person in the Holy Trinity) we cry "Abba! Father!" (First  
Person in the Trinity), and this prayer confirms that we are joint heirs with Christ  
(Second Person).

In our Gospel reading, John also names the Three Divine Persons -- as is also done in  
many other Scripture passages -- yet he speaks of one God.

So the whole Bible speaks of God as three Divine Persons, yet one Divine Essence.

**Fact b.** Each of our three creeds, one of which we will confess in the Liturgy today,  
are trinitarian, thus giving witness to what the church has at all times and all places  
believed.

We Lutherans confess in the Augustana, "**We unanimously hold and teach ... that  
there is one Divine Essence, which is called and which is truly God, and that**

**there are three Persons in this one Divine Essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. All three are one Divine Essence, eternal, without division, without end, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, one Creator and Preserver of all things visible and invisible."**

**Fact c.** Our time/space universe, the everyday world in which we live, was created as a trinity of trinities -- I referred to this fact once before.

Psalm 8 begins, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"(esv) If God's name is "in all the earth," written upon the rocks and trees, the rivers & oceans, and if God's name is a Trinity, then our scientists ought to be able to detect three-ness, triune-ness, in our earth, right?

Setting aside for the moment the fact that Newtonian physics is being questioned by quantum physics after Einstein's discoveries, it doesn't take much of a scientist to see that our world is made up of three things only, no more, no less:

What is our world made of? **Matter, space and time** captured in a trinity -- that's all there is to creation.

And it is a true trinity, i.e., all three must be present for anything to exist -- take away space, e.g., and nothing could exist.

There's more: each part of that perfect trinity is also a perfect trinity.

What is **matter** made of? Three things: energy, motion, phenomena or appearances. Energy, like the power of the atom, produces motion, and the result is things that appear before us -- solid pews to sit in -- human bodies for us to live in -- food and drink -- homes and businesses -- things -- appearances!

Now these things have to have space, elbow-room, in which to be, right?

So what is **space** made of? Three dimensions: length, breadth and height.

That's all there is to space -- e.g., take away height and we'd all be flatter than a piece of paper.

And finally, if **time** did not exist as a trinity -- three-in-one -- there could be no past or future -- as things are, we must have past, present and future, no more, no less.

What a majestic Creator indeed who fashioned us and all that exists after his own image -- he stamped his trinitarian name upon all that is.

The Psalmist continues to praise God: **2b You have set your glory above the heavens. 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?** (esv)

Good question! What are we that God should care about us? Which leads to this Q:

## **Part 2. What Have Humans Turned Out To Be?**

Well part 2 can be rather brief, for we all know that we fall short of what God meant us to be.

Would you please pick up your green hymnals and turn to page 54 in the front of the book.

There, in the so-called "Athanasian Creed," which arose in the church in the fifth century A.D. and was named in honor of the great fourth century church father, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, let's read together, out loud, the first three paragraphs:

**Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.**

**Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.**

**Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.**

What is the catholic faith? Quote: We worship.... Isn't that interesting?  
We confess that what God wants of us is worship -- we are to pray, praise & give thanks to the God who made us, redeemed us, and sanctified us.  
But we all have other objects of worship that we place before God the Three in One -- our children, our homes, our gardens and yards, our pass-times -- oh yes, whatever it is that we prize and value and spend time upon, that can become our god.  
As Martin Luther wrote in his Large Catechism, "That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God."  
E.g., to rely upon our property and investments for our old age, and not daily thank our gracious God for them, is to worship another god.  
Did you notice Luther's word "clings?" It's the same word as in the first paragraph of the Athanasian Creed: we "**should above all cling to the catholic faith.**"  
It strikes me as a desperate image, like hanging onto a life line -- that's what faith is.

Did you see that video on the news last week of the 75 y.o. woman doing her first parachute jump, and she almost slipped out of her harness in mid-air -- she was desperately clinging to her jump companion!  
We must all cling for dear life to the true God, give up our worship of false gods, and be faithful at worship here in this place, Sunday for Sunday.

But I'm waiting for the code -- how is the Trinity doctrine the code for the gospel?

### **That's Part 3, Where The Triune God Acts to Save the People He Created**

When it comes to doctrine, it's too easy for us to treat a description of God, like the doctrine of the Trinity, as a teaching to be believed, and then we're on the right track.

Yes, it's OK to believe that a doctrine is true, but that won't save us from eternal separation from God. The devils also believe that there is a God, **and tremble.**

We must do more than believe **that**...

We must believe **in** the Gift of God who is his Son, Jesus.

This is the chief article of the Christian faith, the article by which the church stands or falls, namely, "We are justified before God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ."

In that one chief article of faith the Holy Trinity is hidden.

Here's how! Jesus tells Nicodemus: **14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.** (esv)

A serpent lifted up on a pole, a Savior lifted up on a cross -- believing the promise -- life comes from looking upon the one lifted up -- is what saved the Israelites from poisonous snakes, and it is believing this promise which saves us: **16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.** (esv)

It was **God the Father** who lifted up His Son on that holy cross.

Whoever believes this promise realizes what Nicodemus couldn't grasp, that we have been born from above, born of water and **the Holy Spirit.**

God the Father's love for the world, God the Son's death upon that cross, God the Spirit's giving us new birth by water and the word -- that's the trinitarian code for the Good News of Salvation.

That Good News fulfills all our needs in this life and in the life to come.

Since we believe such good news, all that remains now, like Isaiah the prophet, when we hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us? is to say "Here am I: send me!"

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.