

Trinity Sunday: the First Sunday after Pentecost

May 27, 2018

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St Michael's Episcopal Church, Barrington, IL

Isaiah 6:1-8; Canticle 13; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Today is Trinity Sunday

1. Officially beginning the long stretch of Ordinary Time
 - a. Comes between Pentecost and Advent in the liturgical calendar
 - b. No major feast days or holidays, at least for the summer
 - c. Priests consider this to be monotony (in a good way)
2. Culmination of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church
 - a. Brings the three persons of the Trinity into the One God of Christianity
 - b. Honoring of each person—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as God (with a capital G)
3. (Joke) Seminarian Sunday
 - a. When interns and seminarians and new priests preach
 - b. Rectors and seasoned preachers don't
 - c. Try to find someone naïve enough to actually attempt preaching Trinity
4. One of few Church days when okay to NOT preach Scripture
 - a. Why? Because ... Trinity is not in Scripture!
 - b. With two small exceptions
 - i. Trinitarian language does appear
 - Matthew 28:19
 - 2 Corinthians 13:14

Matthew 28:19

- Part of Jesus's Great Commission
- Just before end of Matthew's Gospel (28:20 = last line)
- *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*

2 Corinthians 13:14

- End of the letter
- The "Sincerely, Paul" or "Love, Paul" conclusion.
- *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."*

In Scripture, only explicit reference to the Trinity

- When being sent on our way—being told "farewell" or "good bye"
- When being blessed, or taught how to bless.

Not much direction or insight on Trinity in Scripture

- Stuck with trying to use rational thought and Church's traditions (or theology)
- To explain/understand the Trinity

Does not work!

I am not going to preach or teach on the Trinity!

Side comment:

- I rant.
- Certain things I have very strong opinions about
- Often find myself high up on my soapbox ranting about those things
- Before realizing what I am doing.

And the Trinity is one of those things that I rant about...

Not going to preach or teach about Trinity

- Because cannot
- No one can
- As soon as we start to try and explain the Trinity
 - We commit hearsay.

Because the Trinity cannot be explained.

When I said

- Stuck with using rational thought to explain and understand the Trinity
 - Me being facetious
- Can't use rational thought to explain the Trinity
 - It is not ration
 - They are not rational

The very concept of the Trinity is. Not. Rational.

Augustine of Hippo

“If you can fully grasp it, it's not God.”

If you walk away and feel even more confused about who or what the Trinity is, then I've succeeded.

“If you can fully grasp it, it's not God.”

If it **is** God, then you can never fully grasp it.

Sermons and lectures about Trinity

- All sorts of directions
- All sorts of topics
- Still not correct

For example, Quantum Physics

- String theory

- Wave-Particle duality
- Concept of time and space collapsing when $T=0$ for the Big Bang to happen

Unless you know quantum physics
Probably won't make sense to you

Also, not true.

The mystery of the Trinity does not overlap with quantum physics

- Might seem parallel
- Might seem like rough copies of each other
 - Mirror images with a slight distortion (like when you look in a really old mirror that has started to corrode)

Quantum Physics does not explain the Trinity

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Another example, Julian of Norwich and her contemplation of a hazelnut

Chapter 5 of Long Text of *Revelations of Divine Love*
God showed Julian of Norwich a hazelnut

"In this little thing I saw three properties: the first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God cares for it."

Continues:

"What the maker, the carer and the lover really is to me, I cannot tell; for until I become one substance with him, I can never have complete rest or true happiness"

Not the Trinity

Julian offers good reflection

- Opportunity to contemplate the Trinity
- Not an explanation for who or what the Trinity is
- About action in relation to object
 - Object that exists because of God/Trinity

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Common words, language, etc

Most common: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

- Complications with
 - Relations between each
 - Not to mention the issue of gender.

(Coming from a pretty liberal theological education: not uncommon to hear God "the Father" referred to as "Got the Mother")

Attended worship that began Lord's Prayer with: "Our Mother, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.")

"Happy alternative":

- Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer
- Lover, Beloved, Love

Can you think of some?

- Three words
 - Related (kind of)
 - Flow well together
 - Seem to hint at who or what the Trinity is

Explain what Trinity persons do or relationships to each other

Not properly explaining Trinity

Trinity—three persons, one God

Not different actions

Different persons

Trinity is about nature of being, not nature of doing

Because, yes, while God "the Father" is the Lover and Jesus is the Beloved. Jesus can also be the Lover, which He was when he died on the cross, for us, out of love.

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Visual images

- Three-leaf clover
- Egg
- Sun
- Water

Each has three things or three states or three attributes

When separated, loose meaning of the whole

Not the case with the Trinity

Jesus is just as much God as the Holy Spirit

- Having one does not mean having less God
 - As if God was numerable or measurable in quantity

Example: water

- Frozen, liquid, and gas
- Ice, water, and steam

Then Trinity becomes three forms

The Trinity is three persons —three beings— three entities or natures.

These do not reveal enough about Trinity for us to say, "I know" or "I understand" what or who the Trinity is.

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Tradition: Nicene Creed

- I invite us to “profess our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed.”
- That’s the exact bidding I use

Because the Nicene Creed is something we supposedly all believe, and it nicely defines the three parts of the Trinity:

- We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty...
- We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God...
- We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life...

Each section goes into more detail

A favorite moment over the past year

- Working with Ric, helping lead the teens in Confirmation class
- Tasked with the session on “What we believe”
- Walked through Nicene Creed

Didn’t get past the second line about Jesus

- Teens just couldn’t keep quiet any more
 - Shouting and thigh slapping
 - Fits of anger or excitement.
- Questions and answers and even more questions shouted out
 - Heard over and over again, “But how can that be?!?”

Probably most honest anyone has ever been about the Nicene Creed

It’s okay to not know what we are saying
To not understand

Augstine of Hippo: “If you can fully grasp it, it’s not God.”

**Beautiful mystery of God
Incomprehensible
Never fully understood**

In unity, as one God, or in trinity, as three persons, God is beyond our comprehension

Maybe uncomfortable with not understanding

- with believing but not being able to explicitly articulate what we believe

Three persons of Trinity make it easier to understand

Think about this:

Who do you pray to?

- Do you say, “Father...”
- Or, “Jesus...”
- Or, “Lord...”
- Or some other name for God?

Do you pray to the one God or do you pray to one of the three persons?

Which “person” of the Trinity receives your prayers?

And which “person” of the Trinity do you relate to most?

- Inspired by the Creator? The Redeemer?
- Do you feel wind or see fire and think, “The Sustainer is with me”?
- Do you look for an icon of Jesus or a crucifix, for a visual interpretation?

Finally, at the risk of sounding heretical (if I haven’t already)...

- Which person of the Trinity is “your God”?
 - Are you okay with an unknowable, un-see-able God of creation?
 - Do you imagine Jesus is walking with you, as you journey through life?

Before I walk away

Before I end this sermon

Before I finish explaining that the Trinity cannot be explained

Two quotes:

1. A bit harder
 - a. George Horne,
 - i. 18th century Anglican bishop
 - b. In the form of a question, but I have taken liberty to make it a statement

“Christianity is but a manifestation of the three divine Persons, as engaged in the great work of man’s redemption, begun, continued, and to be ended by them, in their several relations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, three Persons, one God.”

The very thing that Christianity is

The very definition of Christianity

Is the Trinity: three persons, one God

And those three persons are regularly and continually working for us, for humanity’s redemption

From the beginning through now and to the end

An end that only the Trinity can bring about.

2. Simpler terms:
 - a. Frederick Buechner
 - i. Modern American theologian and Presbyterian pastor

“The mystery beyond us, the mystery among us, and the mystery within us is all the same mystery.”

Beyond us, among us, and within us.

The same mystery.

The same God.

In three persons.

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**I hope you know less about Trinity now
than before I started preaching**

Also hope you realize:

Moment we think we have officially established a way to identify the how of a three-person-one-God Divine
We are wrong

One God is so much bigger than anything we can understand or fully know

But broken down into the three persons
We have a God that is relatable
 And at least recognizable
When we see God in our midst
 In our lives
 In our beings
 In our doings

Close with Opening Collect:

Prayed to God as overarching theme or request for the day

*“Who hast given unto us thy servants grace...
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity,
and in the power of thy Divine Majesty to worship the Unity”*

*“You have given to us your servants grace...
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity,
and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity”*

Not to understand it, not to fully know it...

Only to acknowledge it; only to worship it

And that is about all we can do when it comes to the Trinity.

Three persons, one God

Our God, in three persons

Let us give thanks to the Lord—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.