



Trinity Sunday (B)

Understanding the Trinity

[RCL] Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29 or Canticle 13 (or Canticle 2); Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

It has been said that it is far easier to preach to hundreds crowded into the church on Christmas or Easter than it is to discuss the doctrine of the Holy Trinity for a handful on a sleepy holiday weekend in late May.

Trinity Sunday is the only day of the entire church year that is devoted exclusively to a doctrine—which is never mentioned by name in Scripture.

Preachers must use caution and craft careful language to avoid the minefields of heresy, only to utilize the same adjective that St. Athanasius used to describe the Trinity – “incomprehensible” – all while hoping and praying that “incomprehensible” is not the word the faithful few at coffee hour will utilize to describe this morning’s sermon!

And yet, while we are right to be chastened by the Trinity’s doctrinal depth and complexity, we must not shy away from it altogether, for it was in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that the confessors endured persecution and the martyrs were willing to shed their blood. Inspired by this belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, missionaries spread the word to innumerable others. Indeed, had someone not shared the Good News with us, none of us would be here today.

The doctrine of the Trinity is, for this and for other reasons, serious business! And as is the case with all Christian doctrines, we can only begin to understand its true depth, complexity, and importance when viewed from the perspective of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

When we think about the Trinity abstractly, it is ever so easy to forget that the central tenet of our faith is not just that we are *created* by God, but that God walks among us, most fully in the person of Jesus, and also in the face of the stranger and the oppressed and the marginalized, and God leads us to new depths of faithfulness in the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, this isn’t something that *has* happened in history; no, God is still, even at this very moment and in every moment, creating, walking among us, and leading us.

By the same measure, viewing the doctrine of the Trinity from the vantage point of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, it is impossible to understand the crucifixion apart from believing that it is God made human flesh in the person of Jesus by the power of the Spirit who dies on the cross and rises from the grave.

It's not God demanding something from someone *else* and exacting a monstrous punishment; rather, it is God's selfless giving of *Godself* to die so that death could be defeated once and for all for *our* sake.

In the same way, it is impossible to understand the resurrection of Jesus apart from believing that God made human flesh in the person of Jesus is *resurrected* through God's own will and action in the power of the Spirit. God's life and love are bigger even than the most monstrous and cruel consequences of human sinfulness.

And finally, the Doctrine of the Trinity necessitates the conviction that God's Holy Spirit comes to us and abides with us unto eternity, guiding us and leading us into all truth.

The Trinity gives us perhaps the most complete understanding of what God is like: God creates us purely out of God's love and desire for relationship; relentlessly pursues us, even stepping in to offer to die so that we might live; and abides with us.

The Trinity helps us see God more fully as God is. It refines and purifies our understanding, our theology, even our evangelism, as a coal taken from the incense burner purified Isaiah's unclean lips.

It is the God we meet in the inexplicable unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who, at every moment, asks, "Whom can I send as a prophet to tell the world about me?"

May each of us, strengthened, purified, and nourished by that self-same God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in humility and boldness, say, "Here am I; send me."

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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