

Holy Trinity Sunday, May 30, 2021
“Blessed Trinity”

Today, as you know, is Trinity Sunday. And that means it’s time for my annual sermon on the Holy Trinity. I know you’ve been looking forward to it all week. I can almost hear some of your conversations. *Hey, are you going to hear Pastor Craig’s Trinity Sunday sermon?*

Are you kidding? Nothing makes for a great sermon like the finer points of Christian theology. Wouldn’t miss it for the world!

So I guess you’re all here because the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is always a crowd pleaser. Probably because of all the suspense: *Is it three gods? Or is it one God? How can one God have a trinity of persons?*

The doctrine of the Trinity is a mysterious and somewhat confusing concept; one we have trouble wrapping our minds around. Yet, for all its puzzling language and abstract concepts, this doctrine of *one in three* is really just about how God has revealed God’s self to us and how we have come to know God and his abounding love.

So this morning, I’d like us to unpack this doctrine a bit. And as we do, I want us to remember that we are monotheists – meaning we serve only ONE God. There is an ancient confession from the book of Deuteronomy that offers the foundation for this statement: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one*. When we say God is one, we are saying that God is one in essence, one in unity, one in being, one in power, one in holiness, one in purpose.

We talk so much about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but we need to remember that they are three reflections of the one reality we call God – the God Isaiah encounters in the Jerusalem temple. From our first reading, Isaiah catches but a glimpse of the hem of God’s robe, and even that is so full of God’s holiness that Isaiah must turn away his eyes, crying out. *Woe is me!*

This text speaks to us primarily about God’s holiness – his separateness, if you will; for that is what holy means. God is so separate from everything else in existence – so different – that we simply have no reference for God; no analogy that will completely explain him. Every metaphor for God eventually breaks down because nothing in creation is comparable to God. So holy – so completely set apart – is God that even the seraphs, those heavenly beings that guard God’s throne, shield their eyes with their wings as they cry out their eternal hymn of praise: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts*.

Yet their song reveals something more: *the whole earth is full of his glory*. As set apart as God is – as different as he is from anything in creation – not only heaven, but also the earth is filled with God’s glory; filled with God’s presence.

And here we have the divine contradiction. This one God – who is so beyond and so unlike anything in the created order that nothing can be compared to him – is also a personal, fully present God who is at work in the world revealing himself in ways that can be encountered and

comprehended. Isaiah cries out, *Woe is me, I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips – yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.* Isaiah tells us that God, who is holy and completely set apart from us, is also for us and present to us.

The Bible reveals this one holy God coming to us in three distinct ways; as three distinct co-equals. The western church has called each of these ways *persons*: the Father – the first person of the Trinity; the Son – the second person; and the Holy Spirit – the third person. Calling them *persons* is not to differentiate them as three individual gods, but to identify them as the three ways in which God has revealed God’s self and God’s abounding love to us.

God is revealed first as Father. Here we see the God who is the creator of heaven and earth – of all that we can see and of all that we cannot see. In the Father, we see a God who is almighty, all-powerful, all everything – again, much more than human minds can comprehend. And that creating, almighty God loves us with the love of a parent. However, unlike human parents, his love is perfect, always having our best interests at heart: providing for our needs, protecting us from evil, and preserving our bodies and souls. The first person of the Trinity, then, reveals the fatherly love of God that creates and sustains.

In the Son, the second person of the Trinity we see God’s love come near to us. Jesus is God incarnate – God with us in flesh and blood to live out his life with us and for us as one of us. God, in the person of the Son, is nailed to the cross to take away the sin that has alienated us from God and to assure us of eternal life with him. So, when we look at Jesus, the Son, we see God as forgiving and loving. We see an up-close and personal God, a God of grace and mercy and redemption – a God of second chances.

Finally, God is revealed in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the wind of God Jesus speaks about in our gospel for today. He is the one who blows where he will, whose work it is to give new birth from above, who sustains us, renews us, and transforms us into the children of God. The work of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify us – or make us holy and acceptable before God. Through the Holy Spirit, the seed of faith planted in us at baptism is nurtured. The Spirit then calls us to step out in faith. He makes us aware of God’s presence, equips us with gifts, and sends us out to proclaim God’s love and grace.

So, in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – God is revealed to us; the God who is one in essence, one in will, one in purpose, one in work. What one wills, all three will. What one does, they all three do. They work in concert.

Although we call the Father *Creator of heaven and earth*, we remember that the Son and the Spirit were also present at creation, working as co-equals in God’s work. Although we call Jesus the Redeemer and Savior of the world, we remember that the Father and the Spirit were also at work in that act of atonement. And although we call the Spirit the Sanctifier and Sustainer of life, the Father and the Son are also at work accomplishing that transformation within us. What one does, all three do. Each is involved in everything God does.

Do we understand the doctrine of the Trinity fully? No! Will we ever understand it fully? Probably not on this side of heaven. But what we need to remember is that the Trinity expresses what is at the heart and center of who God is: LOVE. God is love. And in each of these three persons, that deep, rich, forgiving love of God is present with us. Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty. God in three persons, blessed Trinity. Amen.