

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
Trinity Sunday: The Big Trifecta  
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Psalm 8, John 16.12-15

I'm going to tell you right up front what my goal is for today. My goal is that you leave here this morning still confused...but comforted, empowered, and grateful. For today is Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate the Triune God. That mysterious Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Equal, timeless, three distinct persons in one substance.

Some describe the Trinity as an actor wearing many masks. Others describe the Trinity in terms of roles and relationships...I am a mother, a sister, a daughter, a wife, etc. Still others explain the Trinity with the analogy of water. Depending on the condition, it can be a liquid, a solid, or steam. But it is still H<sub>2</sub>O, regardless of what form it takes.

Donald McKim, author of *Presbyterian Questions/Presbyterian Answers*, writes: "Early Christians worshipped the God who had been revealed to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. But early Christians also believed that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, they encountered God in an altogether unique way. In the early centuries of the Christian church, the church confessed its belief that Jesus Christ was also God. Relatedly, earliest Christians after the day of Pentecost believed that God was present in the church and in their experience in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit also is God, just as is Jesus Christ, and the God who created the heavens and the earth, the God of Israel." (1)

And so in the fourth century, the Nicene Creed was written, articulating that the God we worship is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons are at the same time one God. They are eternal and share the same substance.

So why would I want you to leave here still confused? Because it defies our human understanding. And anyone who thinks they fully understand or can clearly articulate the Trinity... just doesn't get it! No pastor, lay person or schooled theologian can fully explain the unexplainable. There is a reason for the phrase "Mystery of Faith!" Not a one of us can adequately explain all that is God. But that does not mean that we don't believe. It does not mean we cannot have faith and trust in that which we do not fully understand. Rather, we need to do just that! The Trinity helps us understand what God has shown us about God's self thus far. For surely we do not know all there is to know about God! But we can know God.

God has shown us that God desires to be known. Over, and over, and over, God has chosen to have relationship with us in countless ways. The messiah and the Holy Spirit are not unique to the New Testament. They are described and referred to several times throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Today's scripture lesson is but part of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples. Four other times in his discourse, Jesus has made mention of the Paraclete, which means advocate, helper, or counselor. He has promised the disciples that this Holy Spirit will abide within them and alongside them. As in the rest of his sermon, Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for what is to come, and promising them that they will not be left alone, or abandoned.

There is a kind of joke among Bible students, in which they call the disciples the “duh-ciples”, because they just don’t get it. The disciples had walked, talked, eaten, and slept beside Jesus for three years...but they don’t really understand what he is saying. Would we? Do we?

In this part of John’s Gospel, Jesus is speaking more to the community than to individuals. He is warning them that they are not able to comprehend or handle all that he could tell them. Aren’t we often in that same place-- individually and collectively? We often can’t handle the truth, or aren’t prepared to understand it. But Jesus assures us that with faith and trust, the Holy Spirit will guide us and lead us into truth. Our church has many committees/ministries, and before each meeting we pray. Those prayers are important, and we should not rush through them, for in them we are asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We gather to do God’s work as the Body of Christ, and we should always be asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples were not prepared for the road ahead. Neither are we. If not now, then in the past we have, or in the future we will each face difficult, challenging, painful or uncertain times. We cannot fully be prepared for these times because we don’t what they are until they happen. And even if we know what’s coming, we don’t really know what it will be like for us to experience it, until we experience it. What we do know, if we have faith, is that God will be with us. And really, what more could we ask? What greater gift is there than the love and presence of God? Psalm 8, which we heard this morning, speaks of praise to the majesty of God. Praise that is not premeditated, but comes as naturally as the cry of a newborn.

Think about it. In all of creation, God chose us to have dominion...to be the caretakers. Why us? What makes us so special? That God loves us and chose us...that’s what makes us special. And rather than try to figure out “why us,” let us realize that once again we are in the midst of mystery ... of things we cannot fully understand. James McTyre writes, “...it is quite fitting that Psalm 8 and the Trinity are bound together this Sunday. Two mysteries that evoke wonder instead of explanations harmonize well.”

(2)

There are so many roads one could walk down when talking about today’s scriptures that it is hard to focus on a single point. But for me, today, what jumps out is the absolute incredible realization of how much God does to have relationship with us. How much God wants to be known. How available God is! And how unselfish! As Jesus speaks with his disciples in today’s lesson, he is not far from the time of his death. He knows what they do not. He understands what they cannot. But Jesus will not leave the disciples (or us) abandoned and empty handed. The Holy Spirit will encourage and guide the disciples in the ways of truth, in the ways of Jesus.

These words were not only given to the disciples, they are given to us as well. John is telling us, promising us, that as a community, the Holy Spirit will guide us into truth. Will direct us in the ways of Jesus ... if we but listen and follow.

But what we also need to recognize and remember on this Trinity Sunday, is that the Holy Spirit is within each one of us. God invites each one of us to share in the Triune Life of God. God invites us to participate in the very relationship that unites the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No matter how much we may be struggling in our personal or communal lives, how can we not be filled with gratitude and joy? It is so fitting to have the visual effects from last Sunday’s celebration of Pentecost still in the sanctuary

today. For today we offer special devotion to the Godhead. Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three persons in one substance. And we are invited into relationship with this glorious mystery.

Mrs. Albert Einstein was once asked if she understood her husband's theory of relativity. No, she said, but I know my husband. We do not have to fully understand God, to know God. Leave here still confused ... but comforted, empowered, and grateful. Know God. Amen.

- (1) Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers
- (2) Feasting on the Word