

“The Best News of All”

We have heard three readings this morning. We have also said a Psalm together. Despite this being Trinity Sunday, we did not hear the word “Trinity” in any of the readings. That is because Trinity is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. The Trinity grew out of the need early believers felt to explain the relationship between the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus appeared on the scene, YHWH the one and only god of Judaism had been part of Jewish belief for about 4,000 years. The Spirit of God was also acknowledged in Judaism. For example, this Spirit hovers over the chaotic waters in the first verses of the Book of Genesis.¹ There were even ideas hinted at in scripture that YHWH might be the head of a council of gods. We can see that in the number of times that God speaks using plural pronouns. Such as in Genesis 11 when God says, “Come, let **us** go down and confuse their language.”² In books such as Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), Wisdom, and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) there is mentioned the figure called Wisdom or Sophia that is implied existed with YHWH before creation. But none of these led to the idea of a Triune God as expressed in the Christian Trinity.

The theological concept of the Trinity was an attempt to explain how the three persons (hypostasis) of God related to one another in a way that did not destroy monotheism, the idea of only one God. There was also the concern that a Triune God might lead back to polytheism. It was a tough task for theologians to sort out. Some in the world religions believe that Christian theologians failed, and we are polytheistic because of the Trinitarian concept.

I think that most Christians outside of theologians do not spend a lot of time pondering the concept of the Trinity. Whenever we try to get our head around the concept of One in Three and Three in One it makes our brain hurt. This paradox is so difficult to explain in a way that makes logical sense to most people that we do not try. However, that has not prevented people from trying to come up with an analogy for the Trinity over the centuries, but most, if not all, of the analogies have been denounced as heresies because of what they imply about the God.

For example, one analogy says that the Trinity is like water which is found in three different forms—liquid, vapor, and ice. However, that analogy is the heresy of **Modalism**. Modalism implies that God is not three distinct persons but rather one person who is revealed in separate ways. Another analogy is that the Trinity is like the sun which can be experienced as the star, heat, and light. However, that analogy is the heresy of **Arianism**. That theology says that the Son and Spirit are not separate, uncreated, coequal parts of the Trinity, but rather are creations of God. Another analogy compares the Trinity to a three-leaf clover. However, that suggests that again they are not distinct persons, but are parts of a person. That is the heresy of **Partialism**. Another popular analogy is how a man can be a son, husband, and father, but that is also **Modalism**. We could try thinking of the Trinity as three layers of an apple, but that is **Partialism** again. You can see how finding an analogy for the Trinity is hard stuff.

Ultimately, the Trinity is a mystery which cannot be understood through human reason. Instead, we believers must take it as an article of faith. We worship

¹ Genesis 1:2

² Genesis 11:7

God in Trinity and in Unity without breaking apart the Trinity or confusing the persons of the Trinity. If you look at the back of your worship bulletin you will see an image of the Trinity. It is probably the best illustration conceived. It shows that each person of the Trinity is distinct from the other two, and they are each God. I dare not say more than that for fear that the Spanish Inquisition will pounce on me with their vast array of weaponry and their nice red uniforms.³

Joking aside, if we have such a challenging time understanding the Trinity does it make any sense to think about it all? It is a good question, but I think that the answer to that question is a resounding “Yes.” While the Trinity as a theological concept is arcane and mind-numbing, in practice we can be grateful for it.

The aspect of the Trinity that we know as Father is the creator and sustainer of the world. We give thanks that out of love the Father created the world and all that is in it. The creation is not a plaything of God as we see in Greek and Roman theology. There the gods toy with human beings. The gods spread misery for their amusement or vindictiveness. God the Father seeks a profound loving relationship with the created order and especially with humanity. The entirety of scripture is about the Father’s desire for a deep, loving, and uncoerced relationship with humanity.

The aspect of the Trinity that we know as the Son is the redeemer of the world. The Son as manifest in Jesus of Nazareth who came to show us how we could have a powerful relationship with God the Father. Jesus lived that relationship as a human being so that we might have a clear example of faith in and love for the Father. Jesus even went to the extreme of dying as a human and then being resurrected to a new life. Those actions illustrated the promise that is available to us all.

The aspect of the Trinity that we know as the Holy Spirit is our advocate, comforter, and consoler. The Holy Spirit walks with us now that the human Son has returned to the Father. The Holy Spirit is with us just as Jesus was with the first disciples. God knows that our spiritual journey is difficult and does not abandon us. Instead, God gives us access to the Holy Spirit as our companion on our earthly sojourn.

The Trinity is, as our church banner reads, “Emmanuel, God with us.” The esoteric theological concept that is so hard to comprehend intellectually, is the joyful abiding comfort and consolation for each of us.

We can thank God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for being available to us in this way. We do not have to walk alone. As is written in Matthew 11, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”⁴ The promise of the Trinity is fathomless understanding, care, love, and the willingness to share our burdens. The Trinity may be a mystery of faith, but in practice it is our salvation. It is not simply Good News; it is the best news of all.

³ Monty Python, “No One Expects the Spanish Inquisition.”

⁴ Matthew 11:28-30 KJV