

Christ Church Cranbrook
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Sermon for May 26, 2013 ~ Trinity Sunday
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

Since about the ninth century, Trinity Sunday has been one of the major feast days of the Western Church. This feast is different from the rest in that it commemorates not an event or religious figure, but a doctrine: namely, that the mystery of God's being is best described as a perfect unity of three persons – Creator/Parent, Redeemer/Son, and Sanctifier/Spirit. While the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical in the sense that we can find a basis for the teaching in the pages of scripture, it is certainly not fair to say that it is fully developed or even clearly stated in the Bible. It is a doctrine, a dogma, a teaching developed over time by the Church as an aspect of the unfolding revelation of God derived from, but not confined to the pages of sacred scripture.

Doctrine is not Truth, with a capital "T", but rather our faithful *approach to* or *reach for* the Truth. But doctrine that really matters is more than an intellectual pursuit or a theory. The best doctrines are those that speak to deepest needs of those who seek God. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is one such doctrine. That is what I tell those who take Inquirers Classes in preparation for membership in this Church. I think it bears repeating on the one Sunday of the year devoted to the celebration of a doctrine.

To begin with, we have a need to know who created the universe and placed us in it. What kind of power or force is at the center of all life and being? In response to this question, the Church tells us that it is the Lord God Almighty who is the Creator and Parent of all life and being. While God is not a person in the same way you or I are persons, we believe God is best described in personalistic terms. Jesus and others called God "Father." St. Augustine called God "the Lover."

The prophet Isaiah certainly knew God this way. In his vision in the Temple, he heard heavenly creatures crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And he said, "My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." In the revelation to John, something similar happens with the heavenly creatures singing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come... You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Certainly, in our recent attempts to discover more inclusive ways to speak of God, we have had to acknowledge that there is no name or description for God that is completely adequate. When we speak of God using masculine terms, we have to remember that God is not anymore confined to a gender than God is confined to a particular place or time. It may make you uncomfortable to hear someone speak of God as "Mother," but it is no more or less proper to do so than to call God "Father." We must realize that in God's self-revelation, we still see only in part, a glimpse as it were, of the totality of God's being. To see God face to face is something we hope for, long for, and live for.

Gay and I have spent many vacations in the Rocky Mountains. We like to stay near the Never Summer Mountains on the western edge of Rocky Mountain National Park. Several years ago, we were talking to a waiter at a restaurant where we were having breakfast on the morning we set out on our first backpacking trip into those mountains. We were remarking to the waiter, a Colorado native, how majestic the Never Summer Mountains are. He said, "if you think that is something, wait until you see the other side." That's the way it is with our thoughts of God as our Loving, Just, Purposeful Creator/Parent: we have been given enough of a glimpse of this aspect of God's being to make us long to know God more completely, to live our lives toward God, and not away from God.

Then, we also need to know that we have a source of forgiveness and understanding that will not let us down. It is a natural and normal human inclination to develop values and a conscience and an ethic to go along with them. One of my professors in seminary used to say, “If you are feeling guilty, you probably have something to feel guilty about.” Goethe said, “If I were God, this world of sin would break my heart.” Martin Luther said, “If I were God and the world treated me as it has treated God, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces.” Perhaps Luther would have. But the good news for us in God the Son, Jesus Christ, is that God didn’t. God takes another more redemptive approach with us. As the letter to the Romans says, “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

In our declaration of the divinity of Jesus, we are saying that God sees us not just from the viewpoint of a loving Creator/Parent, but with redemptive concern as well. God’s whole reason for dealing with us in Jesus Christ is to offer us forgiveness of sin, release from the guilt that plagues us, to reconcile us and draw us closer to creation’s ultimate purpose. What is so amazing to me about this is how much confidence God has in us, even though we are rebellious creatures. Some days, I wish God didn’t have such confidence in me!

In A.J. Cronin’s book, *Keys of the Kingdom*, a friendship is described between a young Scottish physician and a Roman Catholic Priest. The young doctor, despite his earnest seeking, has never been quite convinced about the existence of God. He is an agnostic. But the doctor has gone to China to cure the plague, which is raging there. In the effort to heal the disease, the physician himself contracts it. The Priest, having heard of his friend’s plight, rushes to the bedside. When he arrives, it is plain that the doctor is dying. Realizing his condition, the physician gasps, “I still don’t know if I can believe in God.” To which the Priest replies, “that doesn’t matter now. What matters most now is that God believes in you.”

The doctrine of the Trinity is more than a theory, more than a hypothesis, because through God the Son, we believe that God believes in us enough to come among us as our redeemer. In Christ, the human spirit can be turned toward the heart of God.

And, we need to know that we have a friend who is near, always able to sustain our faith, to bind us together in worship, and to empower us in God’s mission. So, we proclaim that God is the Holy Spirit, ever present in our midst for guidance, comfort, and strength. Jesus promised, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

There was once a mother who, as she put her child to bed each night, would tell him some of the exciting stories of the Old Testament: Joseph and his brothers, Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, Daniel in the lion’s den, Jonah and the big fish. One evening, when she was telling him the story of David and Goliath, the child interrupted with a question, “but Mom, what is God doing now?” That’s a question you and I might well ask. Sometimes in despair and frustration, we cry out, even as Jesus cried out from the cross, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

In those god-forsaken moments in our lives, as St. Paul says, the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and heirs with Christ of God’s amazing grace. When we speak of God as Holy Spirit, we are speaking to the heart’s need to know that God is still with us.

The Holy Trinity: Three expressions of how One Living God relates to everything and everyone in the universe. If the Trinity were only a theory, it wouldn’t be worth much to us because it would be so weak. But it’s more than a theory. It is a revelation of God to the children of God and it is given to us to help us better know who God is, how God loves us, and how God abides with us as we seek to know God, to love God, and to serve God.