

Trinity Sunday
June 15, 2025
The Rev. Jack Alvey

May God's Name Be Praised – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

On the heels of Pentecost, the day when we celebrate the last person of the Trinity with the Holy Spirit, the Church celebrates Trinity Sunday, the day when we explore all three persons of the Trinity in One God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Traditionally, the rector invites the associate or a guest preacher to preach on what many call Heresy Sunday. You can go ahead and mark one on your heresy tally sheet because I'm breaking tradition.

Today is often called Heresy Sunday because you can't explain the Trinity for more than a sentence without committing some kind of ancient heresy. The temptation, after all, is to try to explain the Trinity in such a way where the congregation will "get it." Well, I have news. There is no "getting" the Holy Trinity. There is only experiencing one God in trinity of persons.

Preachers would be wise to take a cue from the Nicene Creed when preaching on Trinity Sunday. The Nicene Creed is one of the first documents drafted by the Universal Church. Formulated in 325, the Nicene Creed reflects the faith of a Church that previously operated underground for the first three centuries.

For 300 years, there was no formal institution called the Church. Rather, the Church was made up of small groups of Christians littered throughout the land and operated mostly underground for fear of persecution. These small groups had little to no contact with each other and had different ideas about God and the Bible. So, when Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313, these different ideas about God and the Bible were brought to light.

And so, the Church did what it has done for the last 1700 years when complicated issues need to be addressed. They appointed a committee and held a meeting. The meeting was called the Council of Nicaea. The result was the Nicene Creed which described God using a trinitarian formula. As Episcopalians, we believe the Nicene Creed reflects the essentials or non-negotiables of our faith.

Ultimately, the creed reflects our experience of one God in trinity of persons. We experience God through the Father or the Divine Parent. We experience God through Jesus or the Son. We experience God through the Holy Spirit or the Advocate. And yet, when we experience God through the Son, we also realize we are experiencing God in the Father and the Spirit.

The doctrine tries to put into words a concept that is beyond words. It is hard to turn a page in the New Testament where all three persons of the Trinity are not named in some form or fashion. The question then becomes; how do we use the Doctrine of the Trinity? Do we use it to explain our faith, or do we use it to proclaim our faith? Ultimately, the Nicene Creed doesn't try to explain the Trinity. Rather, the creed simply proclaims or defines God in trinity of persons.

While there is a time and place to explain our faith and even defend our faith, explanations and defenses can turn into arguments that become less about witnessing to

an all loving, an all faithful, and an all-knowing God and more about defending our fragile egos and self-image. I'll be the first to admit that I'm sometimes quick to take the bait and get drawn into these arguments that really only serve to divide.

I believe the Church is a more effective in its witness to the gospel when it worries less about explaining God and more about praising God. For centuries, the Anglican Communion, of which the Episcopal Church is a part, has resisted making any official statements or confessions of faith outside the ancient creeds. Rather, we've rested on the idea that our theology or doctrine is best articulated through our prayer book and our praise of God.

While doctrine has its place, doctrine is more concerned with talking about God. Whereas prayer and praise are more concerned with talking with and to God. In one sense, doctrine is static while prayer is fluid and ongoing.

If we aren't careful, we can turn doctrine into an idol where we worship the doctrine instead of the One whom the doctrine points. Using doctrine alone to know God can tempt us into believing that we've sorted it all out. But how can we pretend to have it all sorted out when there is no end to God? How can we mortals dare to think that we completely understand an eternal God?

Today's lesson from John suggests that we will never stop growing in the truth of God. Jesus tells his followers that there are certain things they will not be able to understand right now. He goes on to tell them that the Spirit will lead them into all truth. Likewise, there are plenty of things we cannot understand right now, but the Spirit is also leading us into all truth.

In other words, the revelation of God's Word does not end with the last book of the Bible. Rather, the revelation of God's Word is ongoing through the power of the Spirit. As Episcopalians, we believe the revelation of God's Word can also be discerned through the teachings of the Church and our God given intellect with the scriptures being the foundation.

In the end, we aren't saved by understanding God better. Rather, we are saved by growing in the knowledge of God's love for us and the whole world. We are saved by learning to trust that God holds us close with that love even when the world around us is falling apart. And this knowledge and trust comes through a relationship with the God who created us, redeemed us, and sustains us.

The Doctrine of the Trinity seeks to explain that ours is a relational faith. One biblical commentator describes this faith like this, "the Trinity...casts a vision of God as deeply, irreducibly relational: the one God is constituted by three ongoing relationships. And if human beings are created in the image of God, then in our own way, we must be fundamentally relational, too."

Doctrine is important in that it helps us organize incredibly complex ideas. Doctrine provides a frame of reference. Doctrine does its best to put into words concepts that are beyond words. However, doctrine can tempt us into believing that a life of faith is neat and ordered. We all know that is rarely the case.

Our life of faith is worked out through the messiness of a relationship with God and each other. As Tim Keller once wrote, "People are messy. Relationships are messy. Expect

messiness.” Ultimately, a relationship with the God of faith, hope, and love is the One who can help us find meaning and direction in the messiness of life.

While we may never fully “get” the Trinity, I pray that we learn to trust that the triune God “gets” us. We are sinners in need of redemption. We are broken and in need of healing. We are sheep in need of a shepherd. May God’s name be praised – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.