

Arden Pastoral Charge

May 30, 2021:

Blessed Trinity

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Jesus said: “When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there.”
Today we gather in Spirit, and Christ is here.



Illustration by Sarah Hale

Gathering Prayer:

“Glory to you, Almighty God.

You spoke, and light came out of darkness,
Order rose from confusion.

Glory to you, Jesus Christ.

You met us as a refugee, a threatened child,
The Word made flesh, born in a forgotten place.

Glory to you, Holy Spirit.

You brooded over chaos,
Mothering and shaping God’s new creation.

Glory to you, God, Three – in – One.

You are surrounded by the song of the saints in heaven
And you are present with us now.”¹ Amen.

¹ Celebrate God’s Presence, 211-2.

Scripture: Our scripture this morning recounts a meeting between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Although in the Gospel of John, it is early in Jesus' ministry, there are already hard feelings between Jesus and the authorities. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council – the Sanhedrin, have good cause to be concerned about this Jesus person and his messianic mission, but he is also curious. So it is, he meets Jesus at night, where there may be fewer eyes watching. This is also one of the few times in scripture where Jesus, God and Spirit come together as part of the conversation.

Reading John 3: 1 - 17 from the Inclusive Bible

A certain Pharisee named Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, came to Jesus at night. "Rabbi," he said, "we know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can perform the signs and wonders you do, unless by the power of God."

Jesus gave Nicodemus this answer: "The truth of the matter is, unless one is born from above, one cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said, "How can an adult be born a second time? I cannot go back into my mother's womb to be born again!"

Jesus replied: "The truth of the matter is, no one can enter God's kingdom without being born of water and the Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is Spirit. So don't be surprised when I tell you that you must be born from above. The wind blows where it will. You hear the sound it makes, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

"How can this be possible?" asked Nicodemus.

Jesus replied, "You are a teacher of Israel, and you still don't understand these matters? The truth of the matter is, we are talking about what we know; we are testifying about what we have seen – yet you don't accept our testimony. If you don't believe when I tell you about earthly things, how will you believe when I tell you about heavenly things?"

No one has gone up to heaven except the One who came down from heaven – the Chosen One. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so the Chosen One must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in the Chosen One might have eternal life. Yes, God so loved the world as to give the Only Begotten One, that whoever believes may not die, but have eternal life. God sent the Only Begotten into the world not to condemn the world, but that through the Only Begotten the world might be saved.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Thoughts Along the Way:

“Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!”²

I remember a time when each Sunday worship service began with us singing these words. Singing this ode of praise that recognizes the doctrine Christians call the Trinity. Perhaps that is a memory we share? Trinity Sunday follows Pentecost. “It is a celebration that dates back to the 10th century,”³ and is one of the few celebrations that honour a doctrine. Doctrine meaning a belief or set of beliefs held and taught by the Church. Trinity Sunday celebrates a doctrine rather than a biblical event”⁴ like Christmas or Easter or Pentecost. It is more, or often less, celebrated year to year. The Trinity has been considered a controversial doctrine, responsible for centuries of debate in the church. The

² Reginald Heber ca. 1820, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’, Voices United # 315.

³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Feast of the Holy Trinity, Apr 27/20, <https://www.britannical.com/topic/Feast-of-the-Holy-Trinity>

⁴ Scott Harris, How One Word Can Change History: A reflection for Trinity Sunday, June 14, 2019, <https://slmedia.org/blog/how-one-word-can-change-history-a-reflection-for-trinity-sunday>

doctrine of the Trinity encapsulates the idea that there is “One God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Let’s unpack that. After all, there is a reason it has been controversial. Basically, there is one God. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Father is not the Holy Spirit. Put another way: There is exactly one God, there are three distinct Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each of the Persons is God.”⁵ Or if this is easier for you to understand: $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. And just to be clear, “the Trinity is not three individuals who together make one God. It is not three Gods joined together, and it is not three properties of God.”⁶ That’s not confusing at all, is it?!

One biblical scholar writes that “Christianity adopted this complicated idea of God because it was the only way they could make sense of One God in the context of the events and teaching of the Bible. The accounts of scripture tell us that humanity met God in three different forms. God the Father: revealed by the Old Testament to be Creator, Lord, Father and Judge. God the Son: who lived on earth amongst human beings. God the Holy Spirit: Who filled them with new life and power.”⁷

The United Church’s most recent statement of faith, A Song of Faith, describes the Trinity like this:

“God is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description. Yet, in love, the one eternal God seeks relationship. So God creates the universe and with it the possibility of being and relating.

With the Church through the ages, we speak of God as one and triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We also speak of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer;

⁵ Scott Harris, How One Word Can Change History: A reflection for Trinity Sunday, June 14, 2019, <https://slmedia.org/blog/how-one-word-can-change-history-a-reflection-for-trinity-sunday>

⁶ Scott Harris, How One Word Can Change History: A reflection for Trinity Sunday, June 14, 2019, <https://slmedia.org/blog/how-one-word-can-change-history-a-reflection-for-trinity-sunday>

⁷ Scott Harris, How One Word Can Change History: A reflection for Trinity Sunday, June 14, 2019, <https://slmedia.org/blog/how-one-word-can-change-history-a-reflection-for-trinity-sunday>

God, Christ, and Spirit;
Mother, Friend, and Comforter;
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love;
and in other ways that speak faithfully of the One on whom our hearts rely,
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe.

We witness to Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.”⁸

References to the Trinity in the bible are few. One is found in Matthew 28: 19, at the time of his ascension, Jesus spoke to the eleven disciples saying (I am reading from the Inclusive Bible): *‘Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of Abba God, and of the Only Begotten, and of the Holy Spirit.’* A second is found in 2 Corinthians, where the apostle Paul ends his letter with this: *‘The grace of our Saviour Jesus Christ and the love of God and the friendship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!’* (2 Cor 13: 14).

More often what we find in scripture, is the concept of Trinity – of God, Christ and Spirit appearing in the same story, alluded to together, characters on stage at the same time. For instance, at the time of Mary’s conception, the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary saying: *‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you – and the offspring to be born will be called the Holy One of God.’* (Luke 1: 35). At Jesus’ baptism, each of the four gospels records an account that describes the presence of Jesus in the River Jordan, the Spirit descending like a dove upon him, and a voice from heaven calling Jesus ‘my beloved’. (Matt 3: 16-17; Mark 1: 10-11; Luke 3: 21-22; John 1: 21-34). In the Gospel of John, at the last supper, Jesus speaks to the disciples, saying: *‘the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom Abba God will send in my name, will instruct you in everything and will remind you of all that I told you.’* (John 14: 26). In the gospel of Luke, as Jesus prepares to depart a final time from the disciples, he reminds them to remain in Jerusalem, saying: *‘I am sending forth what Abba God has promised to you. Remain here in the city until you are clothed with the power, the Spirit from on high.’* (Luke 24: 49).

⁸ A Song of Faith, The United Church of Canada.

And today, in our scripture, Jesus speaks to a Pharisee named Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit in order to enter God's kingdom. Nicodemus is already a man of God – a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. But he is curious about Jesus, and cautious about his curiosity. Thus it was he came to Jesus at night. Jesus introduces to Nicodemus, and to us, this idea of being born of the Spirit. He likens the Spirit to the wind that blows where it will, and we know not where it comes from or where it goes. It strikes me that his description was like a prequel to the wind that blew through the house of believers at Pentecost, the wind that was the Advocate, the power from on high, the Holy Spirit promised to them. And in fact, 'wind' as Jesus used it in this scripture, in Greek is *pneuma* (pynoo-mah)⁹, meaning Spirit.

The Spirit from above, from heaven, from God, blows as it will, where it will. It is a God given gift to humanity so that we may enter God's kingdom. For *'God so loved the world as to give the Only Begotten One, that whoever believes may not die, but have eternal life.'* Or, as I memorized this verse as a child from King James: *'For God so loved the world, he gave his Only Begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him may not perish but have eternal life.'*

For God so loved the world, for God so loved humanity, God gave limitless blessings and gifts: the life and ministry of God's beloved child Jesus, who through his death and resurrection offers the promise of eternal life to all who believe; and the breath of the Spirit, the wind that blows where God wills and as God wills, upon humanity so that we may be born anew in God. Born into a family that is eternally loving, whose presence surrounds and comforts, and whose only directive is to share the good news of this love and these blessings and gifts.

This is the Trinity teaching us "the importance of relationship. The three persons of God share in a communion of love that offers us a model for our own Christian life. As the Father, Son and Spirit" – or if you would rather, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer – Mother, Friend, and Comforter – Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love. "Just as these three persons of God are one God, we as

⁹[Strong's Greek: 4151. πνεῦμα \(pneuma\) -- wind, spirit \(biblehub.com\)](https://www.biblehub.com/greek/4151.htm)

Christians are the many members of the One Body of Christ, distinct but united in an interconnected love for God and each other.”¹⁰

There. That wasn't so confusing after all, was it? Amen.

Prayers of the People

“Mighty God, three-in-one, you have created our world,
You have redeemed it through the resurrection
of your beloved child, the Chosen One, the Only Begotten, Jesus,
You have blessed it with your powerful Holy Spirit.

We know that nothing we do can make us worthy
To receive the gifts you give so freely,
And so we rely on your grace when we fall short in declaring your glory
Or fail to love others as you have loved us.

Forgive us, and call us into ways of living that reflect the light of your love
To a world that hungers for healing, for truth and for justice.
Cleanse us, and make us new.”¹¹

Mighty God, three-in-one,
We pray for the needs of all during this time
– for health, for family, for food and shelter, for financial security,
for justice, and for equality.
We pray for wisdom for leaders of nations.
We pray for courage and comfort for medical staff, and for front line and essential
service workers.
We pray for patience as we and our communities struggle with the conditions set
upon us because of COVID-19.

¹⁰ Scott Harris, How One Word Can Change History: A reflection for Trinity Sunday, June 14, 2019,
<https://slmedia.org/blog/how-one-word-can-change-history-a-reflection-for-trinity-sunday>

¹¹ Prayers for all Seasons, Year B, 92 (adapted CMM).

We pray for those who are ill, in body and mind and spirit,
and for loved ones who cannot be close enough to care for or comfort them.

We pray for all who have asked for our prayers...

We pray for all who have no one to pray for them...

We pray especially for those near and dear to our hearts.....

“Awaken us to your three-fold presence in the world this day,
That we may share your love with others,
As freely as you have done for us.”¹²

Hear these prayers as we offer the words given us by Christ to you, our Mother of
Wisdom and our Father...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

We give thanks to God for blessings and gifts given. We, in turn, offer our gifts of
time, talent and treasure to God. Your gifts can be sent to June Hughes for Arden
United Church, Sheila Deline for Henderson United Church, or Sharon MacMunn
for Mountain Grove United Church. You can also visit our website –
www.ardenpastoralcharge.ca – where you will find a ‘Donate’ button.

On behalf of the congregations of Arden, Henderson and Mountain Grove, I do
wish to thank you for your financial contributions to our churches.

¹² Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year B, Vol 2, 4 (adapted CMM).

Benediction:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
Mother, Friend, and Comforter,
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,
By these names we know you, and by these names we go forth.

And now, may the grace of Christ attend you,
the love of God surround you,
and the Holy Spirit keep you. Amen.