

June 7 2020 Trinity Sunday

Today is Trinity Sunday, however, the word “trinity” is not mentioned in the Bible. We say, “I believe in the “Trinity” but what does that mean? Have you ever thought about it? There are several ways to visually explain it. One is with an egg – you have the egg shell, the egg yolk, and the egg white. They are three distinct parts – but they are all EGG.

We have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – they are three distinct persons but are all GOD. I also like Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer. Or, Love, Lover and Beloved. Another way to explain the Trinity is by referring to water – a glass of water, an ice cube, or steam – it is different but all WATER. It is said that St. Patrick explained the Trinity with a shamrock. The three parts of the shamrock represented the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – but at the same time they were all SHAMROCK.

One of the greatest doctrines in the Bible is represented by a word that is not even found in the Bible. That word is trinity. The Bible teaches that God is a triune God. But God has manifested itself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now immediately the objection comes, "Wait:  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ ." Well, your math is correct, but your equation is wrong. Think, for example, about space. Space is length, breadth, and height. But to

figure out the cubic area of space you don't add length and breadth and height. You multiply length times breadth times height.

Take the matter of light. Science tells us that light is actually constituted of three rays or groups of wave links distinct from each other, no one of which without the other would be light. Each ray has its own separate function. The first originates, the second illuminates, and the third consummates. The first ray, called invisible light, is neither seen nor felt. The second is both seen and felt, and the third is not seen, but is felt as heat. Light has three strands, but only one ray. Likewise, God is not one plus one plus one which equals three. God is one times one times one which equals one. You see, the Trinity is not only all for one, and one for all, but the Trinity is all in one, and one in all.

Now at this point you are probably saying, "I don't understand that." Well join the club because I don't either, but I do believe it. You had better believe it too, for your faithfulness upon it. Someone once said concerning the Trinity, "Define it, you lose your mind; deny it, you lose your soul." I assure you that with all of my heart I believe in the Trinity.

I revel and rejoice in it, believing that it is not only a great truth but also one of the unique truths of the Christian faith. But I confess that I find it

to be an enigmatic mystery, an inscrutable riddle. I find that it is complicated, complex, bewildering, and impossible to explain.

One reason for this is that the Trinity is not geared to this mechanical age. Tensions and pressures hurry us through life. A cartoonist has pictured a man sitting in a one-counter restaurant, giving his order to the waitress. He is saying, "I have to be at work in twenty-three minutes. I want one-minute oatmeal, three-minute eggs, two-minute bacon, forty-five second toast, and instant coffee."

An age that goes at a pace like that is not an age that will know very much about the Trinity. The Trinity cannot be explained in just a few moments. It is doubtful if it can ever be satisfactorily explained, yet we need to study it carefully.

"They worshipped him; but some doubted" (Matthew 28:17). That's not a bad phrase for a sermon on Trinity Sunday. That little phrase from today's gospel (Matthew 28:16-20) seems to me an authentic and accurate description of what often happens when we approach this God whom the Church tells us is one God in Three Persons. Worship and doubt stand side by side.

A lot of Christians do not realize the importance of the Holy Spirit in our Christian faith. Today's gospel is a continuation of the Easter story. Two women go to the tomb. It's empty. "He is not here," the angel tells them. "He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." The women "left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples." On the way they met Jesus and he said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; and there they will see me." "When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted."

The Bible we use each Sunday translates the Greek as "some doubted." However, a more literal translation of the Greek is "they doubted." It wasn't just some that doubted, they all doubted even as they all worshipped. Regardless, the point is worship and doubt are not mutually exclusive.

That they doubted doesn't mean that they had no faith or that they didn't believe. Rather, they gave their hearts to the Spirit, but in their heads they couldn't make sense of or understand what was happening. They were of two minds. Their hearts and their heads were not aligned. Part of the experience made sense but another part did not. The experience was real, the logic and understanding, however, were unable to match the depth

and reality of their experience. Who among us hasn't had that kind of experience?

Try to define love or explain to your friend or spouse why you love her or him. Make a list, count the ways: you are pretty, handsome, smart, funny; we have a lot in common; we enjoy the same things; you are fun to be with; you are a good cook; you have a good job; you are a good provider; I am attracted to you; you make me happy; we just fit; I can't imagine life without you. After a while the list begins to sound shallow and superficial because you know at a deep level that list does not even begin to reflect or adequately describe your love.

How can words ever describe or capture the beauty and mystery of two lives shared as one, given to, and received from each other? Can words ever fully describe and explain giving ourselves to another so completely that we live within the other and they within us, neither one losing themselves but each one finding their true and complete self? I doubt it. Words fail. Some things, like love, can be experienced but they can never be fully understood, explained, or defined.

Recall a time you were entranced and enlivened by the beauty of a sunset. Warmth enveloped your skin and you felt a presence that hadn't

been there before. Clouds became a kaleidoscope of changing colors. Light sparkled and danced on trees, rocks, the river. How do you explain that? Is it just light rays refracted by dust in the air and affected by the angle of the sun in relationship to you? I doubt it. Surely, that kaleidoscope of color is more than a visible mass of condensed water vapor floating in the atmosphere. Was the envelope of presence that warmed you nothing more than photons hitting your skin? I doubt that too. Some things, like beauty, can be experienced but they can never be fully or adequately expressed. They are always more than the words.

Have you ever held in your hands the wonder and mystery of a newborn child? Remember those tiny wrinkled fingers, those specs for fingernails, her hiccups, his beating heart, the soft breath that brushed your cheek with awe. How do you explain that? What words can describe that moment? Sure, we know the biology and physiology of reproduction but we still can't wrap our heads around it. Is that child simply the end result of reproduction? Is that how we would describe that moment? I seriously doubt that. We don't look at that little one and see the result of a biological process. In that new life we see and declare a miracle.

Those are just three examples of experiences that are bigger, more beautiful, and beyond what our minds can fathom or make sense of. We

love and we doubt. We bask in beauty and we doubt. We hold new life in our hands and we doubt. In these contexts doubt is not a deficiency. It's a declaration that we have glimpsed the divine and touched the transcendent. It's our recognition that the experience is greater than our words can express or our minds can grasp. In the end, the experience is what we most want. It changes and transforms our lives in ways words, explanations, and concepts never will. If that's true about relationships, sunsets, and babies; love, beauty, and new life; how could it not also be true about God and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity?

We worship and we doubt. We experience the really real but we cannot make sense of it. Despite the trinitarian math of three equals one and one equals three, God is beyond words, explanation, or understanding. Gregory of Nazianzus, a bishop in the fourth century, said this, "No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one."

We are reminded in our United Church faith, that we have creedal statements that cling to this trinitarian belief stating: We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, and a Holy Spirit who works in us and others to reconcile the world.

If the Trinity is about anything it is about love, beauty, and new life. We may not be able to explain this but we know it when we experience it. The how of it all may be beyond our understanding but that does not stop us from seeking it.

The Triune God is ever calling and asking us to take our place among the Three. So, what if we part our ways today not just remembering the words of scripture that “I am with you always”, but opening ourselves to the experience of the Holy Trinity? How might that experience change your life? What would you dare, dream, or imagine? What strength, hope, or consolation might come with that experience? What might God do that would cause you, in wonder and awe, to doubt?

Regardless of who you are, what you may have done or left undone, what has happened in your life, where you go, or what you encounter, no matter how you worship and doubt, the promise holds. The presence is real. And it’s not a promise to be realized in the future. It’s a promise that has already been and continues to be fulfilled. “I am with you always.”

And that’s not a bad place to end a sermon on Trinity Sunday – despite faith and doubt, “I am with you always.” Amen.