

John 16:12-15
Trinity Sunday C
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Living Together

There's a tradition among priests that the preacher assigned on Trinity Sunday should be the newest priest on the block. It's a rite of passage to give the newbie something a bit more complicated, and see how they do. So although this Trinity Sunday, while Fr. Keith is on Sabbatical, you naturally have me as a preacher, the real truth teller of this priestly ritual for us here at Holy Spirit will be determined by who preaches on Trinity Sunday next year and the year after that...so we'll all have to wait and see what happens, and discover if Trinity Sunday becomes a permanent part of my preaching assignments.

The Trinity is not something ever mentioned in the Bible. Not ever. But here we are, with a Sunday dedicated to the Trinity, a Sunday when we commemorate a reality and a doctrine, rather than a person or an event. How'd we get here?

From a historical point of view the early church didn't celebrate a feast day for the Trinity. Matter of fact, the concept of the Trinity took hundreds of years to form. It wasn't until the 4th and 5th century that church doctrine on this topic was formalized, and then expressed in creeds, like the Nicene Creed, which helped to outline the core, orthodox tradition the church knows today as the Trinity: One God in three persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This concept of the Trinity is often illustrated as an equilateral triangle, helping us to visualize that one God, one essence, eternally exists in three separate but equal persons: The Father is God, The Son is God, The Holy Spirit is God, but they are not each other.

It wasn't until the 14th century that the Western church decided that Trinity Sunday would be celebrated immediately after the feast of the Pentecost, helping to emphasize in a tangible way that the first great Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, was actually when the concept of the Trinity was proclaimed to the world... which is why Trinity Sunday is the first official feast day after the birth day of the church.

So while history is interesting, if the Trinity is not talked about in the Bible, why do we concentrate on it at all? Why is it important to think about this fascinating, frustrating, and controversial Christian doctrine?

One reason is because the doctrine of Trinity is an remarkable manifestation of the beauty, intimacy, and forever-love found in God. If we understand nothing else about the Trinity, we should understand it is an example of pure love.

And as human beings, we do need to understand so much more about love and loving relationships.

We know we live in a time that emphasizes the individual, within a culture that routinely encourages us to be assertive and take what we want — to get in there and compete and rush to win, because that's where we find success and success is what we need. And make sure you hurry to get there first, race to that finish line, because there may not be enough for all of us.

The world's truth is to let others worry about themselves — first and foremost, we must take care of ourselves.

But that's not God's truth. Despite what the world says, the truth of how we are called to live our lives in loving relationships, in loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. And the ultimate example to emulate, the perfect example of living in love, is the relationship within God's own self, the beautiful and intimate balance of the Trinity.

Leonardo Boff, an internationally recognized theologian, explains in his book *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* that, "Believing in the Trinity means that at the root of everything that exists . . . there is movement; there is an eternal process of life, of outward movement, of love. Believing in the Trinity means that truth is on the side of communion rather than exclusion; consensus translates truth better than imposition; the participation of many is better than the dictate of one. Believing in the Trinity means accepting that everything is related to everything and makes up one great whole, and that unity comes from a thousand convergences rather than from one factor alone. We never simply live, we always live together. . . (it's) this community style of God's existence, of God's trinitarian manner that is always communion and union of three."

I love Boff's words: We never simply live. We always live together.

The Trinity reminds us of God's deep longing for relationship, not only with God's own self, but for relationship with all of God's creation, and particularly with us, for we as humankind have been made in God's own image. God is constantly reaching out to us in love, and it's through this deep longing to be in relationship, our relational God, not only sacrificed God's own self, the Son, for our salvation, but also sent the gift of the God's own Spirit of truth, as Advocate, Companion, Counselor, and Guide.

John's gospel, the gospel that is so different than the others, is where we learn so much about the Spirit. It's this Gospel that forms much of the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity and the teachings of the Spirit's continuing role in our lives.

Today we heard of Jesus telling his disciples, "I still have many things to say to you. You can't handle them all right now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, she will guide you into all truth."

This Fourth Gospel helps us to understand two great truths about our identify as Christians. The first is that Jesus is the full and complete revelation of God. To see Jesus, to believe in Jesus, is in fact to see and believe in God.

The second is that we can have firm confidence in the Spirit as a continuing and ongoing presence and revelation of Jesus. We need not fear. We can continue to learn and practice our faith in the midst of a changing world because the Spirit is with us, making possible a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Jesus in our own time, to follow Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.

The Spirit nudges us, pushes us to decide how we will choose to live. How will we respond, as Christians, to the needs of immigrants and refugees, to racial inequity, to injustice towards the marginalized, and to religious discrimination?

Will we listen with the ears of our heart, trusting the Spirit to help us discern what it means for us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves . . . or will we turn away, closing in on ourselves in fear, fear driven by that 24/7 information overload of local, national, and global crises that can push us to build up psychological, as well as physical walls, turning away from the plights of others.

Trust the Spirit! Trust the Spirit to guide us in discerning what it means to live into our faith, tackling difficult issues within our own times. The Spirit will guide us in the way of God's forever-love, will help us to recognize the truth of the Trinity — that it's not enough to simply live, but to live together.

God's own relationship within God's self: One God in three persons —the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — shows us the possibilities of life in community, inviting us into that intimate and loving God-relationship which both enables us and challenges us to respond to our world with the love of Christ. Amen.