

Trinity Sunday Year C 2013  
St. John 16:12-15  
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St. George's Bolton  
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## Trinity: A Rule of Threes

*"I still have things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth..."*

We cannot bear the whole truth about God because we cannot grasp it. We cannot get our minds around it. It is impossible even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century for the finite human mind to comprehend God. *'Now we know in part,'* as St. Paul suggested.

When we think of the Trinity, we think of the number three: one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When I was in college I remember a philosopher, of little note, who was onto something, I think. He called it *Trinityism* and suggested that the whole of creation was structured in threes or variations thereof. Perhaps creation reflects this divine structure.

They say things happen in series of threes. Good things, bad things, even things that don't matter too much. There is a law of threes in writing and in public speaking. There seems to be a rule of threes in the scriptures, both old and new Testaments. *"Three things"* seems to be a fundamental rule of the order of the universe. It seems to be the way things work.

In writing, there is a rule of threes which states that things that come in threes are either funnier or more interesting. Think about it: The Three Stooges, Three Musketeers, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Three Blind Mice. And Genies give you three wishes. In the Christmas Carol, Scrooge is visited by three spirits.

The rule of threes even has a Latin title: *Omne Trium Perfectum*: Everything that comes in threes is perfect.

In public speaking and sermons, the rule of threes is to make three main points in a speech or sermon. Martin Luther King, one of the great orators of the last century was famous for it. Many preaching classes teach it.

There are three things you can count on in life: death, taxes and change.

In survival in the wilderness, there are three main goals to tend to: water, food and shelter. In the economics of poverty the formula is food, shelter and clothing.

Also a “three”: It takes three things to make a human being: Body, Mind and Spirit. All three need to be present to make a living breathing human being. Without one, the other two make no sense.

The Bible is full of threes. There are three Patriarchs in the first book of the Bible: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are three great Matriarchs in the Bible: Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. Sometimes Leah is counted as a part of the third. In the Golden period of Hebrew History, there are three great Kings: Saul, David and Solomon.

In the New Testament we start out with the Magi-there are three wise men. Jesus is tempted three times during his sojourn in the desert. Peter denies Jesus three times. Three men are crucified on Calvary Hill on Good Friday. Jesus rises from the dead on the third day. In one resurrection appearance, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. St. Paul puts forth three great virtues for mankind: Faith, hope and love in chapter 13 of I Corinthians.

The rule of threes is also at play in the great commandment of Jesus: We are to love God with all our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves. *Love* God. *Love* neighbor. The third one, of course, is to *love* yourself.

Consider the words of Psalm 8:5 from this morning, when the Psalmist asked: “*What is man that you should be mindful of him? \* the son of man that you should seek him out?*” We know that, as unlikely as it would seem, the creator of the whole universe *is* mindful of each of us, and loves us individually as His children. We know God is with us always, as he promised, and we need only to reach out and call upon him. He it is who walks with us in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

This is also the way we have come to understand God: one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In more modern theological language: God the creator, God the redeemer, God the sanctifier. But there is only one God: “*Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one.*” [Deuteronomy 6:4] When one of the scribes came to Jesus and asked which commandment was first of all, Jesus quoted this passage: [Mark 12:29] “*Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*”

I think it is best to understand the Trinity as one God in three *manifestations*. To use the term “persons” may be misleading in our modern use of language. We know God in three ways: God who created all there is; the same God who revealed God’s self to the people of Israel; God who became one of us and walked this earth with us; and God the Spirit who, like a wind inspires, sanctifies, guides, hears and responds to our prayer, knows our hearts and minds; and vivifies us and reveals the holy presence of God is near.

Three revelations of God, not three Gods. Three in one. One God, revealed to us in three ways. How is God revealed to us? How is God known? God is known in God’s creation. When you gaze at a spring flower, or when you stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon or

when you go for a walk in the woods or a park or a garden. God is revealed in his creation, and his creation is good. Consider all the evidence in the Old Testament. And then God is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. We can know Christ in the words of the New Testament and the prophetic writings and the Psalms. Jesus fully revealed God to us, in a way that we could grasp and understand who God is and how God is. We come away knowing God loves us and gave His life for us on this earth. We know that he conquered death and rose again. And we know God most of all in the person of the Holy Spirit, for this is how God is present to us in our daily lives, in our prayers, and in all our doings and wanderings. God is with us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Go Baptize, teach and remember. Three things Jesus asked his disciples and followers to do in his parting words at the close of Matthew's Gospel. This is the mission of the Church. To bring others to Christ. To teach the world in word and deed about God in Christ. And finally, we are called to remember. We do this in Eucharist today, and we should remember God with each breath we draw.

We bind unto ourselves today, the strong name of the Trinity. As we gather at the table each week, we speak God's triune name: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. Holy Trinity. One God. AMEN