

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 16, 2019, Trinity Sunday

Psalm 8, John 16:12-15

GOD IN COMMUNITY, HOLY IN ONE

I recently joined the ranks of Fitbit wearers. I now have an app on my phone that divides my living into various individual aspects of my life.

I can now look at my heart rate moment by moment. If I look at my phone, I see charts and graphs of my resting heart rate, my exercise heart rate and my agitated heart rate 😊

My sleep patterns are monitored and I can now look at charts of my deep sleep and light sleep and REM sleep.

My watch now nudges me once an hour to get up and put in another 250 steps.

And that's the real reason I got the Fitbit, so I can keep track of my steps and work toward that 10,000 step goal each day.

Although this may seem strange, I was thinking about all my accumulating Fitbit data this week as I thought about the Trinity. It would be easy to focus on one of my Fitbit reports and get overly focused on that one part of my life. But that one report isn't me.

I think too often we get caught up in the formula of the Trinity, dividing the Trinity into Father, Son and Holy Spirit and focusing all our attention on one aspect of God. When we do that, we miss the amazing gift of the complete ways that God comes to us.

If you look at the front of your bulletin, you'll find a chart that was designed years ago to help students of faith understand the Trinity. (see end of sermon) I can remember being guided to draw it when I was in confirmation class, eons ago in the 1970's, and again in college classes in the 1980's.

While the chart is helpful in understand the basics of the doctrine, or belief, about the Trinity, I think we are missing so much of the amazing gift of God in our lives if this chart is all we say about who God is.

The chart does give us the basics: We follow One God who we see there at the center of the chart.

We know our one God in the three persons or parts of God: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, seen in each corner of the triangle.

The chart then goes on to remind us that each of the persons or parts within God has their own uniqueness. So as the chart says:

The Father is not the Holy Spirit or the Son.

The Son is not the Holy Spirit or the Father.

And the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

But together they are our One Triune God.

Are you confused yet? It seems to me the danger of Trinity Sunday is that we come into this day knowing we are going to be confused, and then we get confused, and then we go home,

and don't talk about the Trinity until the next year, unless we're in confirmation.

This chart and this conversation make it feel like we are trying to make our brains understand an impossible math problem: $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. And now here is this chart to add to the confusion.

One author I read this week said: “~~They~~ (the diagrams and analogies) make us think the Trinity is a problem to be solved rather than a reality in which we are called to live.”

<https://www.thebanner.org/features/2016/02/the-holy-trinity-the-community-of-love-at-the-heart-of-reality>
The Rev. Leonard Vander Zee

There is a better way to talk about and experience the Trinity. It changes things when God, known to us in the Trinity, is the “reality in which we are called to live”. On your bulletin cover there is a quote below the chart that the Rev. Thom Shuman, who writes a lot of our worship liturgy, uses at the end of most of his prayers:

“God in Community, Holy in One, hear us as we pray.”

Instead of seeing a chart, that reminds us of the terror of geometry classes, what if we envision God in the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All parts of the one true God, each person of God in their own uniqueness, needed to show us who our God is.

Or another pastor explains it this way: “At the center of all reality, at the heart of the universe, there exists an eternal divine community of perfect love. The Bible calls this community the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... There’s a certain logic to trinitarian belief. The Bible says that God is love, but the only way God can be love is for God to be a community of divine persons. ~~Love does not exist in a monad.~~ God is that eternal community of love.” The Rev. Leonard Vander Zee (see above)

We see the community and connectedness of our God in this morning’s reading from John. God in Jesus, the Son, as he prepared to return to God the Father in Heaven, promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and live within them, guiding them in the truth of God.

Then Jesus reminded them, and reminds us, that all that belongs to the Father in heaven, is held in Jesus’ heart and life, and will be given to the disciples through the Holy Spirit of God.

Here is one picture of the Trinity, among many in the Bible, a picture of the “divine community of perfect love.” Our one God, together in the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, caring for those first disciples, and ultimately caring for us, as our heavenly Parent, our Savior Jesus, and as the Holy Spirit of God making a home in our hearts. All these aspects of who God is, needed to show us how completely we are loved.

When we move from charts and graphs to seeing our God as the “divine community of perfect love,” then in the life of faith we are invited to join into the community of God’s perfect love. It changes everything if we stop trying to wrap our brains around the chart of the cover of the bulletin.

The author I quoted earlier invites us to imagine that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dance together in community, and we are invited to join the dance.

No wonder Hildegard of Bingen, who is quoted on the back page of your bulletin prayed those words: “O Trinity, You are music. You are life.”

Instead of dreading Trinity Sunday, what if we let ourselves feel the joy of being invited into the dancing community of our God?

One of the ways we can do this is to say thank you to our Triune God, our three-in one “God in perfect community.” So, I invite you to take the insert from your bulletin that is the bright yellow goldenrod color.

Next, I invite you to find something to write with. There are pencils in the pews, a pen with each friendship book (please put them back when you are done), and I'm guessing some of you carry more than one pen. Take a moment a make sure that you and those around you have something to write with. Let's take care of each other for a moment and make sure everyone has something to write with.

This morning, instead of me telling you what it is like to be included in the dance of our God in Community, I'm going to ask you think about how you each experience our God, and then say thank you.

You may find it easy to thank God in each of these sections, or you may find yourself without words.

If that happens, don't panic. Instead I invite you to let yourself get to know God better in those ways in the days ahead.

The life of faith is a journey. It is important on the journey to stop and take time to say thank you. Today, on Trinity Sunday, we will say thank you for the "divine community of Perfect Love" that we know in our God.

Please don't see this as a test. This is a chance to write a prayer of thanksgiving to our God.

I hope you will take this home with you. This is a prayer that you can continue at home as well.

We begin with God whom we know as our Creator, our Father, our Mother.

How do you experience God in the creation around you?

How do you experience God as your Divine Parent, as your Heavenly Father, or Heavenly Mother?

Take a moment and write your thank you to God: *God our Creator, Father, Mother, I thank you for:*

Now we turn to God whom we know in Jesus, who lived and died and rose for each of us, and all of us. Let us write:

God, Jesus, Savior, I thank you for:

Now we turn to God whom we know in the Holy Spirit. The Bible calls the Holy Spirit our Comforter, Advocate, and Guide, who prays for us when we don't know how to pray.

Let us write: *God, Holy Spirit, Comforter, Advocate, I thank you for:*

Now I invite you to take a moment and look back over the three prayers you have just written to our God in Community, Holy in One.

Allow yourself to feel the thankfulness of these prayers.

Allow yourself to feel the community of the Trinity, our God we know in these three ways.

Finally, you'll find these words from Hildegard of Bingen: "O Trinity, You are Music. You are Life." I put this quote on your bulletin as another antidote to the chart on the front page. I think this quote gets us so much closer to the heart of the meaning of the Trinity.

Having prayed prayers of thanksgiving to our God in Community, we come to this final prayer, or poem. You'll see these words: Hildegard prayed: "*O Trinity, You are Music. You are Life.*" On this Trinity Sunday, as I know myself to be invited into the Community of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I pray: O Trinity, you are....

God in Community, Holy in One, Hear our Prayers,

And all the children of God responded: AMEN!

BULLETIN INSERT:

TRINITY SUNDAY 2019
GOD IN COMMUNITY, HOLY IN ONE, HEAR US AS WE PRAY

God, Creator, Father, Mother, I thank you for:

God, Jesus, Savior, I thank you for:

God, Holy Spirit, Comforter, Advocate, I thank you for:

Hildegard prayed: "O Trinity, You are Music. You are Life." On this Trinity Sunday, as I know myself to be invited into the Community of God, I pray: "O Trinity, God in Community, Holy in One, you are...."

