

John 16:12-15

Ah, here it is Trinity Sunday again! Once a year comes the task of trying to explain that which is beyond our grasp. How can there be three persons in one God? Some things just need to be believed as we live out the mystery of our faith.

I'm fairly certain you already know that the word "trinity" is not in the Bible. The concept of a trinity is in the scriptures, but the word isn't. The Holy Trinity is a doctrine of faith, a way of understanding who God is; how God presents Godself to the world. Composed of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, those who can be named as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, the doctrine of the Trinity states that there are three persons but one God. There are three ways the one God can be present to us, and no, God is not a shapeshifter because while one person of God is present, the other two persons of God are still individually existing. The doctrine is truly based in scripture especially in the gospel reading from John we heard this morning. All of this is very confusing, even to the best trained theologian, so I can imagine how confusing it must be to the everyday person who hears this doctrine.

But does this really make any difference to us in our everyday lives? We believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who each influence our lives in their own way. What is important is the way they live in community, and that the relationship of love that exists between the three extends to us as well. The relationship of love that exists between the three persons of God extends to us humans as well. We see that the three closely work together.

The Father and Son work closely together, they share everything. The Spirit never speaks on his own authority but only declares what has been shared by Jesus to be communicated to us. As an important aside, we have had a dispute with the Eastern Orthodox Church, about the Holy Spirit evolving from the Father and the Son. In our Nicene Creed we have, for hundreds of years said the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son which is contrary to the belief of the Eastern Orthodox Church who believe the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. In actuality the phrase "and the Son" was a later addition to the creed, the words were not in the creed's original form. In order to create a working partnership with the Eastern Orthodox Church, the ELCA is moving to eliminate the phrase "and the Son" from the Nicene Creed, agreeing that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. That makes no impact on our belief in the Triune God consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit/Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

What the Trinity makes clear is that what Jesus has taught us through the gospels is not something that appeared to be promising but turned out to be disappointing or worthless. Jesus has told us that all that the Father has is his, all the Father has, has been given to Jesus. And when Jesus no longer walked on the earth, the Holy Spirit descended. The Holy Spirit takes what is Christ's (which is the Father's) and declares it. Even if Christ is not bodily present, the Holy Spirit gives us access to Jesus, makes Jesus present to us!

The trinity ensures that the work of Jesus is not just something in the past, not just history. In fact, Jesus' work for us is the center of God, at the heart of eternity. That is what makes the trinity important. Martin Luther developed a good analogy using the trinity. In his commentary on this text Luther spoke of the trinity in terms of an internal conversation in God, with the Father as speaker, the Son as the word, and the Spirit as

the listener (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 364-365). The three are in close relationship with one another. And they are intensely compassionate.

Have you ever thought about what God thinks of you? The answer comes to us in Jesus. The speaker, God, comes to you through Jesus who saved you with His word which is just the articulation of what God intended since eternity. The Holy Spirit is the listener who brings the same word to us in our hearts.

Think of this for a few moments. This concept of the trinity means we have always been on God's mind and in God's thoughts. Luther says that Jesus doesn't give anyone a dirty look, he doesn't treat anyone in an unkind manner or frighten and drive anyone away from him; Jesus invites and draws all to him in the kindest manner, both with his words and with his bearing. We are to be imitators of Christ. I know I fall short in this respect... I know I have given dirty looks, I have been mean, whether intentionally or not realizing what I have done, and I have frightened people away. Maybe you have done the same, whether it was intentional or not. That is something we the church need to consider as we move forward in our faith development. These are things Jesus does not do. And whoever has seen Jesus with the eyes of Faith, according to Luther, also sees the Father with those eyes. If we are going to be Jesus to the world and draw people to God, perhaps we, myself included, need to practice how we treat people. And we can only do this with the help of the Holy Spirit who speaks God's word to us.

The relationship between the trinity is a loving relationship, and that relationship extends to include us in that love. We therefore are to extend that invitation of a loving relationship to all people. All people, meaning even those whom we don't like. In my opinion we don't have to like someone to love them. But loving them means we pray for them, we treat them kindly, we treat them with respect, and we don't gossip about them behind their back. I'm speaking to myself as well as to you when I say this.

The three persons of God live in unity and call us Christ followers to do the same. I'm challenging you, as I'm challenging myself, to live into the loving relationship demonstrated by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
All glory be to God.