

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 East Moline, Illinois
 Pastor Becky Sherwood
May 30, 2021, Trinity Sunday
 Isaiah 6:1-8, John 3:1-17
THE PERICHORESIS OF THE TRINITY

If you look at the front page 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 in the 9th grade, and again in college classes on theology.

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 of God: God is the Father, God is the Son, God is the Holy Spirit, seen in each corner of the triangle.

The chart then goes on to remind us that each of the persons 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.

While the chart is somewhat 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 the Trinity.

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 of the best quotes I've read about the Trinity comes from a Christian Reformed pastor who writes: "To begin with, get rid of all those sometimes silly examples of the Trinity you may have learned over the years—the diagrams and the analogies. They 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

This pastor, the Rev. Vander Zee then invites us into this reality of God, "in whom we are called to live," by discussing a way of seeing the Trinity, that was new to me.

This is a way of thinking about the Trinity started in the early centuries of the church.

I'm excited to share it with you this morning because it invites us to experience the Trinity in such a creative way.

(Since the 4th century in the Eastern Orthodox Church. <http://faithmatters.us/the-dance-of-trinity/>
 By the 8th century it was made popular by John of Damascus)

He asks us to begin with the truth that at the heart of the universe there exists "an eternal divine community of perfect love. The Bible calls this community the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

This understanding of the Trinity introduces us to a word that I'm betting will be as new to you as it was to me. The word is the Greek word: "perichoresis." This word is made up of two words: *peri* meaning around, like our word perimeter, and *chorea* which means a dance, especially a dance in the round. It is where we get our word choreography.

"If you ever saw the movie, "Zorba the Greek", (or you've been to a Greek wedding or party), you've seen a perichoresis – because modern Greeks still use the same word for their ancient folk dance.

In perichoresis the dancers join hands and move in a circle, stepping faster and faster as the music speeds up – until, watching from the sidelines, by-standers can no longer see individual dancers, only the moving energy of the whole circle.

In the early centuries of the church, as thinkers tried to find a way to describe who God is and how we understand the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together, they looked at perichoresis and said, "That's what the Trinity is like!"

Ibid, faithmatters

So, the early church thinkers said that the way that Holy Trinity lives is "circling round" in a dancing community of love.

Each person in this circling dance dwells in and with the others. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united together; they don't lose their individual identities, they are One God together, they are a Divine Dance together.

See: <https://trinityinyou.com/welcome-to-trinity-in-you/19-2/>
"There is union, without loss of individual identity."

What a relief that this picture of the Trinity releases us from charts and graphs and invites us to the dance! God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit dance together in holy community and union.

If you look at your bulletin covers you will see a wonderful symbol or picture of this Dance of God's Divine Love. (see end of sermon)

Ibid, Vander Zee

No wonder Hildegard of Bingen, who is quoted on the front of the bulletin prayed those words: "O Trinity, You are music. You are life."

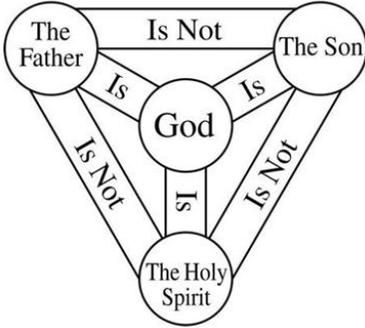
Instead of dreading Trinity Sunday, what if we let ourselves feel the joy of being invited into the dancing community of our God? If you look at that symbol of the dancing Trinity, that picture of perichoresis, you will notice that at the center of the dance there is an open space.

The Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, dance together in a community of Love, and we are drawn into the center of the dance where God dances with us in love.

This Trinity Sunday let yourself join the dance that flows with
the beauty of our Creating, Mothering and Fathering God,
the power of our Saving, Loving, Teaching, Healing God,
and life-giving presence of our Comforting, Counseling, Helping, Praying God.

The Divine Dance of the Trinity is all around us, there is room for everyone, come join in the dance, as we pray with Hildegard: "O Trinity, You are music. You are life!"

BULLETIN COVER



God in
Community,
Holy in One
Hear us as we pray.

--The Rev. Thom Shuman

O Trinity,
You are music.
You are life.

---Hildegard of Bingen, German Mystic and Musician, 1098-1179

