

Holy Trinity Sunday
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Psalm 8
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15

Rev. Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
June 16, 2019

Grace and peace to you all from God - our creator, redeemer, and sustainer - Amen.

When I was a child one of the most confusing days of the church year was Holy Trinity Sunday. This might sound like a funny thing to admit, seeing as I am now a pastor. But it's true!

I often found this Sunday in particular to be mystifying because the divine three in one never seemed to make any logical sense to me growing up.

If anything, this Sunday simply sparked more unanswered questions in my life of faith than gave me insight into the Trinity.

Questions you may have pondered too like - How can one being, be three distinct persons, yet truly be one?

How can Jesus pray to God if he is God himself?

And how on earth can Jesus leave his spirit with us while ascending on up into heaven?

These are all questions I still truly don't have the answers for.

Yet, often times as a young person, my pastor would take full advantage of these questions and our confusion as kids around the Holy Trinity when I was growing up.

On this particular Sunday he would often call us kids up to the front of the church for children's time. During which he would spend a few moments grilling us teasingly with impossible questions or analogies about the Trinity.

Over the years this pastor would bring out props to help teach us about this mystifying and holy being. Things like a three leaf clover, or dry ice, and even a holographic card that would shift to show different images depending on the way you looked at it. Each item had its own purpose to help us understand this great theological mystery of the holy three in one - yet it often left us clamouring to simply catch a glimpse of who or what this trinity was supposed to be in the first place.

Another year the pastor decided to ask us all his "Favourite math question" and the ensuing comedic pastoral sketch went something like this:

The pastor would say: You look like a bright bunch today! Who here likes math?

Of course a bunch of hands would reach up to the sky and then all who wished to participate would be invited to form a line at the front of the church.

The pastor would then tell us kids he had a very hard math question for us to solve: What's one, plus-one, plus one?

Of course, as the pastor went down the line with his microphone each of the kids would excitedly yell out "three" when it came to be their turn to answer before the congregation.

But each time they did, the pastor would simply shake his head "no" and tell the children they had gotten the wrong answer yet again - to the great confusion of the kids.

Once they all had a chance to respond, he would then tell them that - yes, usually the answer to the question - what's one, plus-one, plus one is three, but today special rules applied to this question because we were celebrating Holy Trinity Sunday - so the only possible answer to one, plus-one, plus one today was ONE! Because God was the great one, plus-one, plus-one - God the creator, redeemer, and sustainer.

This answer - while right in the theological sense would not only anger and confuse all the young budding Mathematicians in the room - but it would solidify for many of us that theology was something we might never hope to truly understand - and that these thoughts about God we're likely best left up to the pastor in the end.

It wasn't that we didn't know the "right" answers to the questions the pastor would ask us year after year - it just didn't seem to make much sense - no matter how many times we heard what we were supposed to believe.

And if I were to be honest, the early church was in a very similar position as us kids after Jesus ascension. They were looking for a way to try to grapple with a belief in one true God in light of their actual, lived experience of God's activity powerfully in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and after an unsettling encounter with the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

And the Trinity provided an answer...of sorts. An answer often couched in the language of fourth-century metaphysics. Not that there's anything wrong with using fourth-century metaphysics to make sense of experience. But somewhere along the way the Trinity became less about describing an experience of the living God and more about accepting definitions of who God was.

While this theology surrounding the Trinity has become a central way we as the Christian church have chosen to frame our conversations about God's work and actions within the world - it's not exactly the easiest thing to describe or figure out within the scriptures we hold so dear. After all, God is spoken of in numerous ways throughout this holy word.

In the beginning God is introduced as the great maker of the heavens and the earth, and all of creation.

When Jesus is teaching his followers about God he chose to describe the holy one as the loving mother hen who gathers us for protection under her wings.

When Jesus is in the garden with his disciples he chooses to teach them to pray to God as their caring father.

Through Jesus we come to know God is one with us - born of Mary as a middle eastern Jewish person of colour - who lived and experienced life's joys, sorrows, doubts, and pains before dying in the midst of our oppression and disbelief.

In the birth of the church we find God is the very breath of life - the Holy Spirit - moving and breathing throughout all of creation from the beginning of time.

These ideas surrounding the Trinity are perhaps some of the earliest theological teaching many of us come to receive - they are documented in our creeds, our baptismal covenants, and our affirmation of faith when we become members of the Christian family - all stating that the God we come to know and trust in Christ is in fact God the Creator, God the spirit, and God the son - immortal, indivisible, the great three in one.

Yet, in the midst of all these wonderful and fluid descriptions of God held within the holy word, the church has at times chosen to water down the brilliant imagery and mystery of God to make the triune one more palatable and acceptable for us to come alongside and understand.

The church has done this over the centuries through its rigid enforcement of our doctrinal creeds, by insisting that any kind of change in their language - especially when it comes to the use of feminine or neutral pronouns when referring to God, would somehow upset the intricate balance between the three persons we have come to lift up as the holy one. Even though we know we have all been made in the image of God. Which is why here at Holy Spirit we rotate through a number of different creeds to help us better see the diversity and beauty reflected within the trinity within our world.

At times the church has gotten ahead of itself by trying to explain away the holy mysteries of the triune one by assigning a task list to each member of the three in one.

God the father and creator - check!

Jesus the redeemer and saviour - check!

The Holy Spirit, inspiration and wisdom - check!

Like we could ever hope to ascribe a job description to the Trinity's creative and redeeming force within the world.

And we as a church have been working hard to undo some of these assumptions as a congregation through dwelling in the word and missional thinking. Both of which are practices that take us out of our own check lists and draw us out into the mystery of what the holy one is up to within our lives and our neighbourhood.

Yet throughout our lives we have also been wrongfully taught that to question or have doubts in the face of the mystery of God's holy being is somehow a mark against us as people of faith. That we somehow have to have everything figured out to hold a valid membership in this family of faith. And yet we know, trust, and believe as people of faith that God is still residing, moving, and creating change within our lives and our world in ways we can't even begin to hope to explain.

Which is why it is so important for us to listen to the words of Christ in our gospel lesson this morning... "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12)...the spirit will guide you in truth...

First, I think it's kind of awesome that Jesus admits that there are simply some things his followers can't bear to take in yet. The fact that the disciples – those who have spent so much time with Jesus – do not have all the answers is a wonderful and releasing thing to hear. And it's clear that Jesus isn't excusing them or us from ever moving on from their current state of faith and belief. But he has promised that they will have more to learn with the help of God's spirit who will come alongside and guide them as they discover a path forward together.

So maybe for us, like the early disciples, being a part of a community of faith that leans into the holy mystery of the trinity means striving to be a place that knows it doesn't have to have all the answers figured out.

Maybe it means we can be more real with our doubts and our struggles and our pain together in faith - trusting that we aren't alone on our journey together because we are bound up together in the spirit.

And just maybe, all this helps us hold space for those who bring different voices and experiences of God's wonder and grace within their lives into our midst.

This is the heart of the Trinity within this family of faith.

A heart that knows that as much as we try, our faith journey isn't about having all the answers but about being open to the ever present grace of God that flows through us.

A heart that trusts that even our most earnest attempts we can never fully explain the Trinity or god's love - but we can feel it in the midst of this place when we come to worship and serve our neighbours.

And a heart that can rest in the dance of the trinity that is happening all around us. Drawing us together as God's people with all the saints of every of time and place within creation.

So maybe we don't need to worry about the trinity so much after all. Maybe we just need to place our trust in the one who had said - we are not finished moving and breathing within the world yet. And May this be so among us - Amen.