

“God in Three Persons?”

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First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

June 11, 2017

[Psalm 8, Acts 2:1-4, John 3:13-17](#)

Last week, Pastor Chuck mentioned in his sermon that I would fully explain the Trinity today. Shouldn't be a problem, right? I mean we've all heard multiple explanations of the Trinity before. The Trinity is like a three-leaf clover, or maybe it's like water – liquid, solid, and gas, or maybe it's like a man who is a son, father, and husband. We've all got this thing figured out, right? I've shared with you before that, during my first semester of seminary, the professor spoke about the Trinity as a mystery that we can never fully explain. My reaction was one of disappointment – this so-called professor was telling us to give up before we even tried! I learned, slowly but surely, that mystery is one of the true hallmarks of our faith. Those metaphors for the Trinity are all flawed – none can truly represent the Trinity. We try and try to find a clear explanation, but we fail, because we are meant to embrace the mystery in God. The late theologian William Placher said, “Trying to make things clear is often a mistake in theology.” We are in good company, though, in making such a mistake.

The doctrine of the Trinity has caused much dissent and argument. Over the centuries, there are many heresies of the church stemming from different points of view of the Trinity. The official statement of the Roman Catholic Church is the Athanasian Creed, which says that if you do not believe in all of the doctrines of the church, including the Trinity, you “will doubtless perish eternally.” This led Martin Luther to state “To try to deny the Trinity endangers your salvation, to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity.” It is beyond our comprehension. Finis Ewing, one of the founders of the denomination I was raised in, said “mortal worms who would attempt to comprehend it, do but prove their presumption and folly.” Yet, this doctrine of the Trinity has great significance in the Christian Church – even having its own Sunday, Trinity Sunday. Trinity Sunday has been observed on the Sunday after Pentecost since 1332. So why do we focus on this doctrine? Why does it have its own day when it is not even something we can understand?

We come together each Sunday to worship God and God is revealed to us in three main ways. God is revealed as Father, Son, and Spirit, or we might say Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. We use the language of the Trinity not as a way of *explaining* God, for we can never understand God. We use the language of the Trinity as a way of describing the revelation of God that we have experienced. The idea of the Trinity is to recognize that we see God from three different angles. The divine being remains unchanged, though our viewing angle changes. The scripture that we have read today expresses those different ways that we experience God, as Creator in Psalms, as Redeemer in John, and as Spirit in Acts.

In the Psalm that we read, the Psalmist speaks about the glory of God's creation. We first experience God as creator. The opening of the Bible speaks of God creating the heavens and the earth. The first words of the Bible are "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." There is nothing before this. Our human, finite minds attempt to understand God and all we do is place limits. We cannot understand a God who exists outside of the boundaries of space and time and place. Though we say "In the beginning," we still think there must have been *something* prior to that. We put God into categories of human creation. "In the beginning, God" We really should just stop there. Before there was anything else, there was God. *In the beginning, God.* God was there to create the magnificence of the heavens and the earth and then God made humans in God's own image. We are a reflection of God. We are a symbol of God's love. We are part of the creation of our creator God. The Psalmist runs out of words and can only repeat "how majestic is your name in all the earth!" We know our God as creator.

We know our God as creator, and we know our God as redeemer. As much as we know those words from the first chapter of Genesis, "In the beginning, God," we probably know better those words from the third chapter of John. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." God sent Jesus to redeem us all. Jesus had the eternal Word of God incarnate in Him. Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. The gospels tell us of the saving act of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to save us from our sins. And yet, that is certainly not all. Jesus came to earth to show us the face of God. The familiar words from 1 Corinthians remind us that Love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Jesus is the human example of the love of God. For God so *loved* the world, that God sent Jesus. And then Jesus showed us what that love was about. Jesus showed us how that love breaks down barriers between people, how that love extends to all of God's children. Jesus showed us that we should love not only our friends, but our enemies. Jesus

showed us that love means serving others and washing one another's feet. Jesus taught us to be peacemakers and how to respond to hatred with love. Jesus taught us that loving Him means giving food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. It means giving clothes to the naked and taking care of the sick. It means visiting the imprisoned. By living His life as an example for our lives, Jesus taught us how to live Christian lives. Jesus came to teach us how to live and to save us from our sins. Through Jesus, we know God as redeemer.

We know our God as Creator and we know our God as Redeemer. Finally, we know our God as Sustainer through the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts of the Holy Spirit rushing in like a mighty wind. The Spirit was present in the creation story of Genesis. The Spirit was there at Jesus' baptism, descending in the form of a dove. The Spirit of God is with us always. There are many names for the Holy Spirit and they are helpful in understanding how the Spirit of God acts in our lives. We know the Spirit as Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Comforter, Friend, Sustainer, and Sanctifier. The Spirit is even said to intercede for us in prayer. When we do not know how to pray or are unable to pray, Romans 8:26 tells us the Spirit intercedes "with sighs too deep for words." The Spirit is with us to help us in our daily lives. We learned how to live from the example of Jesus' life and the Spirit is there to help us to live that life. The Spirit of the living God is there to encourage us and even to prod us when we need it. The Spirit is the source of various gifts of ministry. Paul says that the fruit of the spirit is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." These are the attributes that are given to us through the Holy Spirit, which sustains us in our Christian journeys. We know our God as sustainer through the Holy Spirit.

Yes, we know our God as Creator, as Redeemer, and as Sustainer. We know our God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We know our God as Speaker, Word, and Breath. We know our God as Rock, Cornerstone, and Temple. We know our God as King of Glory, Prince of Peace, Spirit of Love. We know our God as Source of all Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit. These are all names that humans have come up with to attempt to describe the ways we know our God. They are all imperfect, as humans are. Trinity Sunday is a chance to celebrate the different ways in which we experience God. It is a chance to affirm that we see dimly now, but one day we will see God face to face. Right now, we don't understand how God can be three-in-one, one-in-three; but one day, we'll be able to discuss it with God. For now, we go on, attempting to describe our encounters with God, even while knowing that our descriptions will never be sufficient. In the end, the most

important thing is for us to always strive for a closer relationship with our God, in the diverse ways that God chooses to appear to us. Amen