

Today is the third of the feasts that come after the day of Jesus' resurrection on Easter. The first was Jesus' ascension to heaven, the second we celebrated last week-Pentecost, and today is Trinity Sunday, where we celebrate God in all of God's divine fullness. Actually, we do this all the time but today is set aside in special remembrance of the Trinity and is a day when no one really wants to preach because in preaching about the trinity we can edge into heresy without even trying.

To remedy this, I'll start with the heretical beliefs first. Remember, these are all ways the Trinity has been viewed or explained but they are inaccurate or just plain wrong. The following heresies deal with who God is, some claiming to be trinitarian but not getting there and some denying the trinity totally.

### **Modalism**

...taught that the three persons of the Trinity as different "modes" of the Godhead. In other words, God exists as Father, Son and Spirit in different eras, but never as triune.

### **Tritheism**

...Tritheism confesses the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three independent divine beings; three separate gods who share the 'same substance'.

### **Arianism**

...taught that the preexistent Christ was the first and greatest of God's creatures but denied his fully divine status. The Arian controversy was of major importance in the development of Christology during the fourth century and was addressed definitively in the Nicene Creed.

## **Docetism**

...taught that Jesus Christ as a purely divine being who only had the “appearance” of being human.

## **Ebionitism**

...taught that while Jesus was endowed with particular charismatic gifts which distinguished him from other humans but nonetheless regarded Him as a purely human figure.

## **Macedonianism**

...that that the Holy Spirit is a created being.

## **Adoptionism**

...taught that Jesus was born totally human and only later was “adopted” – either at his baptism or at his resurrection – by God in a special (i.e. divine) way.

## **Partialism**

...taught that Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are components of the one God. This led them to believe that each of the persons of the Trinity is only part God, only becoming fully God when they come together.

Whew, that was a lot of information. All of these beliefs made sense to someone at some time. However, they are incorrect and do not fully allow us into the depth and majesty that God is.

So, what then exactly is the Trinity?

The belief in the Trinity is the bedrock of our belief in God. It is found in the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds—both lay out the basic tenets of our belief in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And, if you want to take a deep dive into our Trinitarian theology you can go to the historical documents in the prayer book, page

864 to be exact, and read the Creed of Saint Athanasius which more comprehensively sets it out. Still, none of the creeds fully explain the Trinity. That is because, at its essence, the Trinity is a mystery and our acceptance and belief in a trinitarian God helps us enter into the mystery and be blessed by God's presence.

Here are some things we do know:

From the beginning, God is trinitarian. As we see in the reading from Genesis, God said "Let us make humankind in our image" which gives us a glimpse that God is a relational being.

The term trinity is never used in the Bible but as we see in the Gospel reading, Jesus commands his disciples to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Jesus, who is God, is showing us that when we bring people to God, we are introducing them into the relational being that has always existed.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians which we did not read today, Paul blesses us by saying "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." It is this triune God that created us, is with us and shows us how to be in communion with God, and with each other.

In the book, Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis explains that if God is love, which 1 John tells us God is, then God must be a community of persons that can be loving and beloved. How exciting is that? We love because God loved us and God is able to love us because God is three persons eternally and timelessly joined in a loving communion.

The Right Rev Frank Logue, the newly consecrated Bishop of Georgia, sums it up well in his sermon for this day:

Before God created everything we see and know, there was a communion of three separate persons of the Godhead who created you out of love, for love. Not just one being, but relationships and communion, before time and forever. This is why you were created: to be in healthy, loving, generative relationship with God and all creation. And out of this web of relationships comes both your salvation and the redemption of all creation.

God, through the trinity, shows us how to be in a loving and mutual relationship with others.

Rev. Scott Sharman explains well how the trinitarian God gives us an example of love and what that means for social justice:

... if we, as human beings, are created in THIS image, we have the basis for some pretty radical conclusions about social justice: We are called to be persons who come to understand ourselves to be so deeply interconnected with all others that the idea of using someone's race (or gender, or sexuality, or anything else) as a reason to hate or exclude them from us becomes nothing less than a form of theo-anthropological heresy.

On this Trinity Sunday God is once again calling us into love and communion with all people to work mightily to bring God's

love, peace and kingdom to this earth. The great commission that Jesus gave all of his disciples, including us here today, compels us to make disciples of all the world and “teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

And what did Jesus command us to do?

Love God with all our being and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells us what that means:

- Do good to those who hate you
- Bless those who curse you
- Pray for those who abuse you
- Turn the other cheek
- If someone steals from you, give them more
- Give all you have to those who beg
- Refrain from judging
- Forgive others that you can be forgiven

Jesus knew that when he gave us these commands that it would not be easy. However, he wanted us to know that God loves us and by the example of the interconnected, loving and mutual trinitarian God, we are to live in the same manner of the God who created us and share our love with all the world. It is only when we engage in these extreme behaviors that we are lights to enlighten the world. It is only when we pray blessings for

those who curse us that we are exemplifying God's love for humankind. It is only when we pray for those who are abusive towards us that we are able to create God's kingdom here on earth.

Now, please do not hear me say that it is okay for others to be abusive or violent towards us. It is not. And, we have to remove ourselves from people who are striving to hurt us. But, we have the responsibility to still offer them the AGAPE (Greek for the selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love) love that God offers us.

We are to follow the example of God, to be in love and communion with God and others because it is only in love that we make a difference in this world. Here are some concrete things we can do to share God's love with others:

1. Keep in relationship—even though we are still social distancing, we can call or write others. Maintain contact, reach out if you need to talk to someone. I am almost always available so call me or a friend. Check in with those who are vulnerable or at risk during this time.
2. Pray. It doesn't have to be long or involved. It can be from the Book of Common Prayer or not—however you pray, continue

to do so and take time to listen to God. We don't have to do all the talking when we pray.

3. Educate yourself about racism and white privilege. We can't all join protests and we probably shouldn't as rates of Covid-19 are on the rise in Oklahoma but we can learn about what the Black Lives Matter movement is trying to teach us. Books suggested include:

- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, by Michelle Alexander
- Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- Race Matters, by Cornel West
- How We Fight White Supremacy, by Akiba Solomon and Kenrya Rankin

There are many other books—do research, find them and when you learn something please share it with the rest of us. I've read many posts online from people of color that it is not their job to educate us and they are correct. Perhaps we can start a Zoom book club for discussions. Let me know if you are interested.

We must educate and share what we learn so that we can all do better.

Rev. Ann Murray  
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And, that is what God wants us to do—be better, do better, be loving, be relational. I am thankful for a trinitarian God that is within the Godself, loving and beloved. I am thankful for a trinitarian God that loved so much that humans were created in and by love. I am thankful to be part of a church that is part of the Jesus movement that wants to share God's life-giving and liberating love with all.

Amen