

6.15.2025 Holy Trinity

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Proverbs 8:1-4; 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

“God’s love poured into our hearts”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today on the first Sunday after Pentecost we celebrate and remember the Holy Trinity, who is the triune God at the center of our lives. Though the word “trinity” is not in the Bible, the Trinity is openly revealed in scripture. Jesus is the window through whom we see and know the Trinity: Jesus calls God the Father, himself the Son, and promises the Holy Spirit. In Holy Baptism, we share in the unity of the Trinity as we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As modern Christians, we easily say things like God is “one in three and three in one.” For example, today’s gathering hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty,” contains the words, “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.” Though we easily say these phrases, have you ever tried to explain the Trinity to someone?

One day when I was home from seminary visiting my parents, the doorbell rang. Upon opening the parsonage door, I was greeted by three Islamic men who politely asked if they could speak to the pastor. When I told them my father was not at home, they replied, “That’s fine, we would like to speak with you.” The main purpose of their visit was to ask why Christianity called itself monotheistic yet believed in three gods. They wanted me to explain the Trinity to them. Though I was a first-year seminarian, I don’t think anything I said convinced them of the Trinity. Years later as I think about it, believing in one God is perhaps easier than trying to explain three persons in unity with one another. This dilemma of trying to explain the Trinity was one that early Christians also struggled to express.

For example, a second century church father, Theophilus of Antioch, attempted to express the triune God using the Greek word *trias* or “triad,” writing that the God of the New Testament is “God, Logos, and Sophia.” Though Theophilus described the three persons, he struggled to fully express the unity of the three as one. It was a North African church father named Tertullian who writing in Latin first used the word *trinitas* or Trinity to describe the mystery of one God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Though the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds confess God’s triune nature witnessing to three persons as one God, standardization of theological vocabulary about the Trinity remained unfinished. After Nicaea in 325, another early church father, a Cappadocian named Basil of Casarea, precisely defined vocabulary about the Trinity that we still use today. Basil wrote that

God is “*mia ousian, treis hypostaseis*, meaning God is “one substance, in three persons.” To this day we express the divine mystery of the Trinity as “one in three and three in one.”

Though this history is crucial to understanding the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is no substitute for seeking to live in unity with the Trinity in whose name we are baptized. Jesus’ command to baptize in the name of the Trinity shapes Christian community. In baptism, our names and the name of the Trinity are brought together with water and God’s word, welcoming us into God’s family as sisters and brothers. Suggesting baptism, Paul writes, “*God’s love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.*” God is love; in baptism God’s unity of love is poured into us.

The early church spoke about the inner unity of the Trinity as “co-inherence” – meaning the three persons of the Trinity not only cohere or exist together in unity, they are also interdependent in their unity. A Greek word, *perichoresis*, was later used to describe this as a complete, undivided and interdependent unity of divine love. In baptism, this is the coherent unity and interdependence we come to share with one another and the triune God.

Yet one glance at the world reveals, not unity and coherence, but the incoherence of human community. Our lives are often incoherent, at odds with others, with ourselves, and at times with God. When we fail to love our neighbor in need, when we love ourselves more than others, when we love things rather than people, we experience disunity and incoherence.

We are baptized to live in community with God and with one another. Jesus says, “*Love one another as I have loved you,*” yet for all our modernity, knowledge, and insight, we continue to struggle with the unity of love that Jesus calls us to live out with our neighbor. Like the doctrine of the Trinity, love isn’t simply an idea, it is a verb – it is a way of life.

Another Cappadocian father named Gregory of Nyssa, wrote of the Trinity, “we envision a paradoxical diversity-in-unity and unity-in-diversity.” Gregory helps us to see that the idea of “unity in diversity” is not some new-fangled idea; but rather, an explanation of the biblical witness about the inner relationship of the triune God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cohere in a unity of love with one another, each of them interdependently reaching outward to the world. In our modern culture wars, if we seek to expel, erase or cancel the idea of “unity in diversity” then we must also expel, erase and cancel the triune God because God exists as a diversity of three in a unity of one. The Holy Trinity is the original “diversity-in-unity” and “unity in diversity,” helping us to see our interdependent need of one another in the sharing of God’s gifts.

In a world of radical individualism, we have individualized both God and our response to God. We have turned the experience of God into an individual and private experience with often little relationship to others, society, and our neighbors in the world. Amid the growing signs of nationalism around the world, we champion our greatness above other nations, seeking to go it

alone, rather than in finding our unity among the diversity of other nations and peoples.

In contrast, the triune God creates human community. God the Father walked with Israel in the wilderness and again with Israel in Babylonian exile; the Father sent his Son Jesus to gather the outcast into genuine community with God; and the Holy Spirit gathers the full diversity of humanity into new community with Christ's body. The triune God of scripture is a God of coherence, interdependence and unity, loving and welcoming all who call upon God's name.

Despite all the incoherence of our world, our violence, divisions and wars, God continues to return to us, as Paul writes in Romans, "*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*" Every week in word and sacrament, God offers a co-inherence of forgiveness and welcome that overcomes our incoherent lives with unity, helping us to forgive and welcome others as God has welcomed us.

Knowing the triune God as the unity in diversity of three persons, helps us glimpse and even grasp our own unity amid a diverse and often divided world. The mutual self-giving of the Holy Trinity helps us confront the fact that too often Christians have turned a blind eye to a complicity with wealth amassed but not shared; material abundance created yet often hoarded; peace created, not through forgiveness and acceptance, but through military force. The world is rocked by the incoherence of classism, discrimination, and the outright oppression of those Jesus calls us to feed, care for, and to welcome. It is God's love that gives coherence and unity amid the world's diversity.

On Holy Trinity Sunday, we give thanks for a God whose "three in one and one in three" co-inherence invites us into God's self-giving and interdependent life. Greatly encouraged, we live in unity with the triune God so that we might live in community with our neighbor.

If someone were to ask you to explain the Trinity, what would you do? To be a Christian isn't about one hour on Sunday morning, it is about how we live out the other 167 hours of the week. We love because the triune God first loves us. We forgive because God forgives us. We welcome the diversity of others because God has welcomed us in our own.

God is "three in one and one in three." God's love has been poured into our hearts for a purpose. In an often incoherent and divided world: welcome, love and forgive others.

In doing so, God's love poured into you will bring you and others into the unity of peace. Amen.