

God in Three Persons, Confusing Trinity
John 14: 1-4, 25-26
May 30, 2010

*“Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!”*

We just sang those words. Though we sung out loud and proud, do we fully appreciate or understand what those lyrics mean? God in three persons, blessed Trinity! If I were to ask you to explain the Trinity, could you do it?

I'm sure most of us could describe the Trinity. The Trinity is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When pressed to define each of those parts and how they relate to each other, many would have a hard time doing that. I titled this message “God in Three Persons, Confusing Trinity” because I believe we do get confused when we try to make sense of this theological concept.

On the liturgical Calendar today is designated Trinity Sunday. Trinity Sunday is always one week after Pentecost. Since I was not here last week I thought it would be good to talk a little about the Holy Spirit. Since I will be talking about one part of the Trinity, I might as well cover all three.

Let's begin by considering the relationship God has had with humanity since the beginning of creation. In the King James Version of the Bible, a translation that many here grew up with, Genesis 1 verse 1, reads: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In this very first sentence in the Bible we are introduced to one characteristic of God, that being, the creator.

The term most associated with this function of God is Father. When we think of that title words like protector, observer and judge may come to mind. As we read through the Hebrew Scriptures, those roles are indeed played out by God.

Except for a few people, God was distant from humanity. God used angels or dreams to convey messages. Though God was worshipped by the Israelites, they clearly did not sense a personal connection to God.

This all changed when God decided to become one of us. In Jesus, God showed the world the character of God and the expectations of God. It was through Christ's death and resurrection that humanity gained redemption over sin and death. Jesus referred to himself as the son of God. That term "son" was then attached to his role in the Trinity.

This is where things get tricky. Jesus of Nazareth was a man. Though he was Emmanuel, God with us, he was still a solitary person. When his mission was through on earth, Christ returned back to be with God. Actually to say Christ went back to be with God is false. To be with someone means there are two distinct entities. In a Trinitarian belief, Christ and God are not two different beings.

What trips us up is the word person. God in three persons! Webster's defines person as "An individual human being". This is the common understanding we have. What I found interesting is the second definition that is given in the dictionary. *Person: one of three beings of the Godhead.*

Christ is not separate from God. Christ is the way we experience a relationship with God. Unlike the ancient Israelites that felt removed from God, we can know the Almighty through the part of God we call Christ.

When we read our Bibles we can find the story of our Creator setting up creation in a certain way. It does not take to long before humans mess everything up. Christ came along to redeem humanity and get things back to how they are meant to be. This redeeming work of God through Christ is the second characteristic we place upon God.

The last part of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. The best way I can define the Holy Spirit is to say it is the way God touches our lives with wisdom, strength and courage. When we think of spirit there is a mystery there. A spirit has no form. In a sense, a spirit it is just an energy that exists. As the Holy Spirit, God is able to empower and encourage us.

If I was here last Sunday, I would have had us read the story from Acts. Fifty days after the resurrection the Disciples were in Jerusalem. There in a room, maybe the same room where they had their last supper with Jesus, God's Holy Spirit came upon them. Being filled by the Holy Spirit, they went out into the streets proclaiming their faith in Jesus.

If you remember the story, Peter delivered a message to the crowd. Upon hearing his words over 3000 were baptized and became believers that day. That group became the foundation of the good news movement. Soon the word was shared throughout the Roman Empire. Through the Holy Spirit folks were given gifts to build up the church and fruit to strengthen their lives.

I mentioned camp during the announcements. There is a song we sing at camp. It goes like this. “O the fruit of the spirit is not a banana, the fruit of the spirit is not a banana, if you want to be a banana you might as well hear it, you can’t beat a fruit of the spirit. The fruit is love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

It through the Holy Spirit that God touches our lives. Just like Christ, the Holy Spirit is not separate from God. The Holy Spirit is just what we use to name a way God relates to us. The term used to describe this part of God is sustainer.

So there you have God in three persons, the creator, the redeemer and the sustainer. I would like us to go back to our reading for this morning because in that reading we find the 3 parts of God being described.

Jesus says, in my __ (Father’s House) there are many rooms. Here we have Jesus referring to God as the Father. Jesus uses an image we all can understand; a home with many rooms. Earlier I quoted from the King James. Do you remember how translation dealt with John 14? “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

A house with rooms! Who owns the house, who created the house? God!

“I am going to prepare a place for you. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am.”

As the redeemer Christ has made it possible for us to be with God through all eternity. Not only goes God provide a place for us, God provides the way to achieve this salvation.

“I have told you this while I am still with you. The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything all that I have told you.” Here Jesus is telling his disciples that God will not leave them after he is physically gone. God will continue to bless them through an invisible presence. All one needs to do is open oneself up to God’s movement and they will receive what they need to continue the work of Jesus.

“God in three persons, blessed Trinity.” Hopefully this explanation has made the Trinity a little less confusing. Now what application does knowing the Trinity help us in our faith? It is one thing to have head knowledge but it’s something different to have heart knowledge.

By heart knowledge I am talking about the emotional and spiritual impact our beliefs have upon us.

By understanding God can be experienced in several ways, we can focus on the aspect that is most apparent to us. For example, if you were up north this weekend and you saw a beautiful landscape, God the creator would be on your mind. When awed by creation we can praise God at that moment, thanking God for all that is around us.

As you ponder the works of God you decide you no longer want to live just for yourself. You have heard other people talk about how important their Savior is to them. You want to have that kind a meaning for your life. In a moment of submission you give yourself to God.

It is Christ that you connect with. God’s love in Christ allows you to be freed of all your mistakes from the past. You are given new life, a life that will end up in the Kingdom when your earthly body gives out.

Once you start on the road of Discipleship, the Holy Spirit will always be there for you. When you are down or confused, or looking for some assurance, God the Holy Spirit will come to encourage, to inspire and to motivate.

I want to end by sharing an image. I know I have used this before, but it is helpful in understanding the Trinity. Think about electricity. There is the power plant that generates the electricity. This plant can be thought of as God the creator. The electricity is then carried to our homes and businesses

via electric lines. The lines are the source of power. Christ can be viewed as the lines. We plug into the main power supply through the lines. Our access to God's Power is through Christ.

Finally there is the light bulb. Electricity flows through a light bulb to make it work. In some ways we can say light is an expression of electricity. The Holy Spirit is the power of God at work in the world today. It is our recognizing something that is not visible.

I pray that we all can and will experience God this weekend. Just as we remember the sacrifice others made for our country, may we remember the sacrifice God made for us. God is three persons, blessed Trinity!