

**A Sermon Preached  
at  
St. George's Madrid  
by  
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.  
16 June 2019  
Trinity Sunday  
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31  
Romans 5:1-5  
John 16: 12-15**

***Jesus said to the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now..."***

Today is Trinity Sunday. One of the seven major feasts in our Christian Church Year, and the only one that celebrates a theological concept, rather than an event in sacred history. It is the Sunday when we celebrate, ponder, and consider the concept of the Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Not exactly an easy concept. In fact one seminary professor once said it could be equally well called the Feast of the Holy Mystery, or the Feast of Theological Confusion! It is a bit of a difficult concept. But let's look at it.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church talks about the Trinity, saying "God exists in three persons and one substance; God is one, yet self-differentiated; the God who reveals Himself to humankind is one God equally in three distinct modes of existence yet remains one through all eternity." What does that mean?

While we may be fairly familiar with the concept, or not, it hasn't always been a part of our thinking about God. The idea, the concept arose in the second and third centuries, and is based on Jesus' praying to the Father, saying He is one with the Father, and talking about the coming of One after Him, the Holy Spirit. As the early Christian writers, Origen, Tertullian, St. Augustine and others, tried to reconcile these statements of Jesus with the idea of one God, the concept of the Trinity was developed. But the idea didn't really develop fully until Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire in the 4th century. At the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in the 4th century, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the thought was formalized but it wasn't until 828 that Pope Gregory IX initiated Trinity Sunday and 1334 that Pope John XXII promulgated regularly into our church calendar. Other later Christian writers, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Barth, and Karl Rahner have added to our thinking about the Trinity.

So God is three, yet one, and again three. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Jesus said in our gospel today, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now..." maybe he was talking about the fact we are still struggling with this concept two thousand years later...

So let me try an analogy here. One that makes great sense to me, water, H<sub>2</sub>O. I would like to suggest that the Trinity is like water. H<sub>2</sub>O, water is three molecules, two of hydrogen and one of oxygen. Water. At room temperature we know water as a flowing liquid, running, calming and soft but also very powerful, shaping mountains and streams and raging as floods. Incredible force and power, but very life giving and calming. Below zero degrees Celsius or 32 degrees

Fahrenheit, H<sub>2</sub>O is ice. Hard, difficult to touch for long, and going from liquid to solid can break glass, shatter rocks, and kill living cells. Above 100 degrees Celsius, 212 degrees Fahrenheit, water is a vapor, steam. Burning, impossible to be in the presence of, powering locomotives and electricity plants, producing geysers, and killing almost all living substances. It is the same water, H<sub>2</sub>O, the same three molecules, but in three different forms. And easily interchangeable one from the other and back again. Fascinating — water: liquid, solid, and gas. All water. The Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Or perhaps, think about a caterpillar, a chrysalis, and a butterfly. A caterpillar is small green worm, that spins a cocoon, turns into liquid mush, and becomes a butterfly. All three lovely in their own right, very different, yet all the same molecules and atoms and DNA, just recomposed miraculously. How???

God is bigger than we can understand. Remember our gospel passage today, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now...” The concept of the Trinity is but one example of how we try, as humans with brains not quite big enough, to wrap our arms around the idea of God. But perhaps we try too hard... Father Richard Rohr, that great writer I like so much, has counseled that we shouldn't try to pin it down too tightly, to box it up too perfectly, for there is mystery. He says sometimes we try to over-define the Trinity, saying, “*This* is the work of the Father... *This* is the role of the Son... *This* is the what the Spirit looks like...” And then he goes on to say, “Remember, mystery isn't something that you *cannot* understand — it is something that you can *endlessly understand!*” He says that we can circle around and around and get closer but we never fully get there. So don't lament too much if you don't fully get the concept of the Trinity.

So let me add one other concept. Relationship. There is a theological term called *perichoresis*. It describes the dancing of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They call it a Divine Dance. And it suggests that the Trinity is about relationship. And the space between them and how they interact, rather than a definition of each of them. We can see the relationship, but we don't have the language for the pieces. The space between them is how they interact, which is love. And a lesson for us. I like the idea that it is not just an old God sitting up there by himself and looking over the world and judging, but rather a loving, living, God dancing with others. The Trinity, dancing and enjoying Creation.

For life is about relationship. As are we. We are all in relationship, many relationships. Think about the words: Woman, Girl, Mother, Daughter. The first two stand alone; the second two require relationship. You cannot be a mother or a daughter, or a brother or a sister without a relationship. God is about relationship. As is the Trinity. So perhaps we have Trinity Sunday to consider relationships, our relationships one with another.

And as we consider relationships, perhaps the charge for us today at St. George's Madrid, is to further our relationships. So I want to do something, that won't be totally comfortable, for Anglicans, or Episcopalians. But trust me. Please. Look around, to your left, to your right, and behind you. Look at the people here. You are in relationship with them. But I suspect there is someone here you don't know very well. Or at all. And there are essentially three different congregations here, that don't know each other well. That was certainly highlighted here two weeks ago when I asked Solomon, our church's sponsored seminarian, to attend all three services and many didn't know him or who he was. So look at someone you don't know,

connect visually, and after the service, say hello and attempt to get better acquainted. It is not easy. It is not comfortable. But it is important and it gets easier the more you do it.

I know from experience. When I was young and in school, we call high school, before university, I was very shy and not outgoing, and certainly couldn't do what I do now, extensive public speaking in a variety of venues. At university I joined a fraternity and they taught me socialization. As a first year pledge we had to greet everyone who came into the house within one minute of their entering the fraternity house. It was tough. But it had to be done and if you didn't, you would hear about it at house meeting on Monday night. I initially hated it, but the more I did it, the easier it became. And now I can meet, say hello, talk to, and more importantly befriend, anyone I meet. It just takes practice. Even intense introverts can do it. So I would like to suggest that we practice more of that here. And get to know one another better and foster our relationships. Don't just talk to those you know, but meet, and get to know, someone new. That's what the Trinity and Christianity are about.

Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now..." God calls us to be in relationship, and models that with the Trinity. So, take a look at someone you don't know that well, or at all, and after the service, say hello, and connect. And God will be praised. And you both will be enhanced.

Amen.

#### At the Announcements

I am working hard to get to know you all. And I would like to ask you to help me with that. And it can take two forms. First, for a while, and until you are sure I know, help me by reminding me of your name when we meet. I'm Ginny, I'm David, I'm Dolores, I'm Robert. And then do that with others in the congregation. Get to know one another and let them know you. Make it a game, perhaps, 'Father John says I should say hello, I'm Francine, tell me about you.' You will be amazed at what you learn about other parishioners and what a rich and wonderful collection of people is here. And if you need some help at first, a few other questions may be helpful, such as, What brings you here? Why are you at St. George's, what is important to you, or Tell me about your life may help. See what's out there. It builds relationship, it builds community, and it builds the Church. I'm John!

One seminary teacher said, "Any attempt at a logically consistent explanation of how God can be three and one at the same time is, from the beginning, more wrong than right; more untrue than true. There is no way to explain it that actually does it justice."