

Trinity Sunday, Year B
Christ Church
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John 3:1-17
May 27, 2018

Today is Trinity Sunday. It's the only Sunday in the Church year that focuses exclusively on a doctrine of the Church, however if you are hoping to hear an explanation of the Trinity, I am likely to disappoint you. I could tell you, as many have said, that the Trinity is a mystery, but one of my favorite professors in seminary said with great seriousness, "*If you ever* give the easy answer that the Trinity is a mystery, I will haunt you from my grave!" So, yeah, I can't forget that, and I agree with her that it's important to know that this doctrine evolved out of historical, theological, scriptural, and political debate over a period of time spanning hundreds of years.

The early Christians needed a way to explain who God was to each other and to those outside of the Church. So all the good Christians of the first and second centuries got busy attempting to do this, which resulted in a great deal of heresy. Then they began to argue with one another and this caused much division in the Church. Gee, this sounds familiar!

The first ecumenical council was called in 325 at Nicaea – think of this as a giant Vestry meeting that lasted a really long time! And this meeting was called, not by the Church, but by the Emperor Constantine. You see, Constantine was sure God had given him his huge empire, and so he was determined to keep this very generous God happy. He wanted to end the arguments that were beginning to cause division in his empire. This first council, and a number of others which followed it, resulted in the Nicene Creed and a doctrine of the Trinity.

The creed was the best way the early Christians knew to describe God and even then, it was not a complete description. John of Damascus, a 6th century monk and bishop made an attempt to better describe God saying, "It is plain, then, that there is a God. But what God is in essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable. God then is infinite and incomprehensible; and all that is comprehensible about God is his incomprehensibility." Did that help?

In our Gospel reading, Nicodemus has come to visit Jesus because he has seen and heard many things, and like all of us, he has questions and he has doubts. His assumptions about who God is, and how God acts have been turned upside down. On some level he understands that Jesus has come from God, but then Jesus brings the Spirit into the equation, telling Nicodemus he must be born from above, born of water *and* the Spirit. This idea was as difficult for Nicodemus to understand as the Trinity is for us to explain!

In order to begin to understand who Jesus is, Nicodemus first had to see and experience him in a new and unexpected way. Have you ever had your assumptions about God turned upside down? Sometimes this looks like realizing that what we were taught about God as a child might not be the best or most helpful description of God. As we age and experience life, we grow in faith and our relationship with God changes. Nicodemus expresses the kind of confusion we can all feel when we stumble over our own preconceived notions of who God is or how God acts. Most of us would have asked the same question – how can one be born again? But Jesus is offering Nicodemus (and us) an awesome and radical truth - that the Spirit can come and blow right

through our preconceived notions, self-certainties, and tightly wound ideas to open us to the possibility of new life, to being born anew. This new life in Christ, inspired by the Spirit, is transformation that comes from God, who is always re-creating us by opening our minds to new ways of understanding. We may have a difficult time explaining this transformation and re-creation, but perhaps we can recognize times when we have experienced it. And the Trinity may just help us recognize these experiences!

At the very core of theological explanations of the Trinity is the idea that Father, Son, and Spirit are in essence a community. Although each is distinct, they move as one, always connected, always complementing each other. The Trinity as community is made visible to us when we see volunteers go to places of devastation all over the world to help people in the midst of disaster, which in turn helps us see that people of all races, faiths, and demographics are created in the image of God.

We see Trinity as community when our Youth lead worship and encourage us to use all of our senses to participate more fully. When the wind of the Spirit blows through worship, some might not be comfortable, but others are born anew with the change of worship style.

This past week I saw the Trinity as community when the women of this parish worked to provide receptions after two funerals, one small and one large, that fed not only tired and hungry bodies but also aching souls in need of care. It is life lived in the community of the Trinity here at Christ and Grace that feeds us, comforts us, strengthens us to be the hands and feet of Christ in this world.

And yet the question still remains - does the doctrine of the Trinity even matter? How many of us are thinking about church doctrine when we are awake in the middle of the night and can't sleep for worrying, when we argue with our spouse, when we hear of yet another shooting, or when we receive an unexpected diagnosis? Probably not many of us are stopping to ponder the doctrine of the Trinity in those times! But maybe the nature of God *does* matter to us in our times of worry, dissention, fear, or loss. Because when these things happen, that's often the time when we may begin to ask questions, have doubts about our faith or need some help. And when we, like Nicodemus, are out searching for light in the darkness, it's our community of faith, as an image of God as Trinity, which will sustain us.

Perhaps this concept of the Trinity can help us see that defining the Trinity is less important than living the Trinity. As a congregation that lives the Trinity, we are called and sent by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ for the sake of the world God created and loves so much.

All of us, at some point, will find ourselves feeling like Nicodemus, doubting or not understanding what is happening in our lives, or questioning and wondering about the mysteriousness of God. But if we will invite the Spirit to come and blow through our doubts, and through all the worries and challenges of our lives, we will be born anew. We will experience the Trinity in a community made visible here and now, exactly when we need it most. Maybe we can't define the Trinity any better now than we could before, but perhaps we will experience the Trinity in a community made visible here and now, exactly when we need it most.

In the name of the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.