

The Dance of the Trinity

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May 30, 2021. What does the Trinity mean for us? Why does it matter? And perhaps most important, what do the readings for today reveal about all the ways that God shows up in our world?

Readings: [Isaiah 6:1-8](#), [Psalm 29](#), [Romans 8:12-17](#), [John 3:1-17](#)

*** Transcript ***

Today is Trinity Sunday, so I kinda feel like I should probably be standing up here in front of you who are in your pews, in front of you who are in your homes, and eloquently explain the doctrine of the Trinity, perhaps even using a three-leafed clover metaphor, the way St. Patrick did centuries ago. On the surface, the idea of the Trinity seems pretty straightforward — three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God. Simple enough, right?

The reality is that life is not that simple, and as Mr. Jesse was saying, so much change happens naturally — and then on top of that, in the last year all of the “change to the change.” (I love that phrase.) And the reality is around the Trinity, wars have been fought, and people have died, because of differences in understanding the Trinity. And yet the Trinity stands, and we confess it here at Christ Lutheran every week. In the creeds we claim the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as three persons in this Triune God. And it's one of the greatest mysteries of our faith.

I'm sure you will be relieved to hear that I will not attempt to sort out two millennia of conversations, battles, arguments, and council doctrines on the Trinity today. Far more important for us, I believe, is what does the Trinity mean for us? Why does it matter? And perhaps most important, what do our readings for Trinity Sunday reveal about all the ways that God shows up in our world?

Psalm 29 paints this picture of God in waves crashing on the ocean, in the flashes and booms of powerful storms, and in the silent and formidable presence of enormous trees that are centuries old. God's majesty surrounds us, overwhelms us, and although it touches us, we can't quite bear to touch it. This is God, creator of the universe, deserving of glory, before whom none of us, truth be told, are quite ready to stand. The full majesty of God makes us quake in our boots, at least a little bit.

In Isaiah, we enter a vision of God called Yahweh, seated on a throne, surrounded by seraphs singing “Holy, holy, holy!” Isaiah is called into a swirl of turmoil and anxiety of a community that has just lost their king of 30 years. Talk about change! Isaiah feels completely inadequate, and it's no surprise that his first response is, “Woe is me! I am unclean, and yet I have seen the Lord!” In a miracle of grace, God prepares Isaiah, so that he can cry, “Here am I. Send me!” And God prepares not just Isaiah, but us, you and me, to go out as witnesses to this grace.

Jesus, God-in-flesh, tells Nicodemus about the intimate connection between Christ in his humanity, and us in our humanity. God came to us in Christ to bring life and redemption, to embody the love and promise, and to be in relationship with us, on our terms. And in that relationship, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, our brokenness is redeemed, and our joy is made complete.

In Christ, God enters fully into our suffering, as well as our joy. God goes through all these changes that we've been talking about with us. God is with us in that. God-in-flesh embraces our grief, and shows us through the resurrection that death and loss will not be the final word. God enters our joy, and

revels with us in the beauty of creation around us. Jesus-God sits with us, eats with us, laughs with us, cries with us. Because God revealed God's self to us in Jesus, we know that God is not only majesty and splendor and power, but intimately involved in our everyday life. Because God became fully human, we know that we are never alone. We have a God who understands what it means to be human.

And interwoven in all of this is the Spirit, perhaps the most mysterious aspect of the Trinity. Jesus tries to explain this to Nicodemus, too. “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” The Spirit empowers us to recognize who we are as children of God, and it is only through the Spirit that we call God Abba, Father. The Spirit breathes life to dry bones in the desert, anoints and calls the apostles in fire at Pentecost, calls Jews and Gentiles alike to baptism in the days of the early church. “The wind blows where it chooses...”

And as we read this passage again 2000 years later, we can perhaps be comforted by knowing that even Nicodemus, teacher though he was, didn't understand it fully. He badly wanted to understand, wanted in a way to touch Jesus, but then found that he just couldn't get there. Just as Isaiah felt overwhelmed by his experience of God, so did Nicodemus.

The Trinity is complex, and it's defied definition for millennia now. So, for today, it seems enough to trust that in the Trinity, our God is all things for us — majesty and power, a fellow traveler intimately acquainted with our human experience, and one who tells us who we are and empowers us to witness to the world.

And when all of these things come together in the one God, something happens that goes far beyond division of labor, each person filling their appointed role. It cannot be adequately captured in any one metaphor, although I am sure you can imagine that doesn't stop me from trying.

In *Quest for the Living God*, Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson describes the Trinity as three persons in a dance that never ends. She writes, “The three circling around in a mutual dynamic movement of love, God is not a static being, but a plentitude of self-giving love, a saving mystery that overflows into the world of sin and death to heal, redeem, and liberate.”

Johnson presents an image of God in relationship with God's self, equal, fully grounded in love. This is the motivation for creation — God did not create the world to follow law or do God's will, but to be in loving relationship with God, with us, and with the rest of creation. And the Trinity is one of the greatest mysteries of our faith. As hard as we may try to neatly define and understand the Trinity, we discover as Nicodemus did that God will not be contained.

Paul tells us that we've been given the Spirit of adoption as children of the Triune God. We are adopted into that love that overflows into our broken world. We are intimately integrated into the mysterious, creative, moving, loving, healing, inspiring, transforming Trinity. We, along with all creation, are invited to the dance, which never stops evolving as creation continues, 2000 years after Nicodemus struggled to wrap his mind around the mysteries of God.

Jesus tells Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it chooses... and so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” We are, Paul tells us, adopted into the Trinity, and we are called to follow the Spirit where it chooses. Not to understand, not to define, certainly not to limit — for ours is a God who will not be so easily contained. We as God's beloveds are invited to enter the sacred dance, and empowered to join Isaiah in saying, “Here I am, send me!” We're children of the Triune God, and we follow the wind.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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