

Trinity Church (ELCA)

Stephens City, Virginia

Sunday's Sermon

May 22, 2016

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The Holy Trinity [C]

This, as we all know, is "Trinity" Sunday: a day named after our church! Just kidding...

It's actually a day that has been celebrated in the Church since the 10th century- and argued about ever since. It's not categorically stated in Scripture – not like Baptism or the Eucharist - yet, it seems the early Christians soon discovered that they simply could not speak of God without speaking of the 3 ways in which God had revealed himself to them.

The Trinity remains a mystery: God showing-up in 3 forms: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter – so much a mystery that the best we can do is use metaphors to try to explain it.

United Methodist theologian Leonard Sweet – admittedly quite unsuccessfully – compares the Trinity to a 3 way light bulb: 'the first attempt at 'mood lighting:' 'trying to read?: click the bulb up to 150 watts. Just sitting around talking? click down to a hundred watts. Wanting to snuggle with your sweetie?: Down to 50 watts. One light bulb-3 different experiences of what it produced.

So much for that one!

Or, maybe it's like the "As Seen On TV" 3-in-1 cooler which fans and cools the air through a sprinkling system, freshens it by releasing negative ions, and uses a strainer to extract all the crap that plagues your allergies.

Don't think that one's much better...

How about the one from Dr. John Pavelko: comparing the Trinity to a 3-in-1 laser pointer, stylus, and ball point pen contraption he once saw advertised: enter data with the stylus; rotate the top and sign a contact, and, when all your work is done, I guess you use the laser to torment your cat.

Weak. *Really* weak!

Maybe it's like the Dell all-in-one printer: copier, printer, fax – with a 50-page auto feeder...

What???

The best metaphor I've seen is the water, ice and mist one: all water, but in 3 different forms.

All of those – to some extent – struggle to feebly explain the *nature* of the Trinity, but not the *function*. And, just because you know what something is, if you

don't know how to use it in some beneficial way, what real good is it?

A student once, even got an A+ for flatly proving it couldn't be explained: a college philosophy class assignment to 'Prove or Disprove the Existence of God' – you had 10 pages in your blue book with which to do it.

The top grade went to the student who reasoned that, in effect, the assignment wasn't 'rationally possible' by using the rules of logical proof.

First, he asserted: for a 'proof' to be valid - the one trying to validate it would have to be *objective*: that is to not care one way or another whether there *was* or there *wasn't* a "God" but, since everyone has a stake in the answer one way or another, it was reasoned that such a proof was impossible to attempt.

Secondly, he said in seeking to prove or disprove, we would only be able to use the things that can be observed and verified by human senses within the known created world. You might be able to 'prove' – at least on paper – that something in the created world was God – but, it was just as likely that you'd 'prove' that that 'something' which *seemed* to be God could not possibly *be* God...but that wouldn't negate the possibility that something *else might* be.

And, this kid did all that in less than a half page.

The doctrine of the Trinity doesn't try to "explain" God, but simply describes what we know about him...*so far*. So, here in a nutshell is what I know about God – and probably *more* than I know about the Trinity:

Seems to me that there are 3 things the doctrine of the Trinity is attempting to say about God and how we experience God: that God *cared* enough in the first place that God '*created*'...

That God *loved* enough to *save* us – mainly from ourselves...

And that God knew he couldn't leave us to fend for ourselves.

As for Creation, here's how one of my favorite poets – James Weldon Johnston put it: 'God stepped out on space, and he looked around and said: 'I'm lonely - I'll make me a world.'

Then God smiled, and the light broke, and God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and rolled the light around in his hands until he made the sun; and the light that was left, god gathered it up in a shining ball and flung it against the darkness: spangling the night with the moon and stars.

Then down between the darkness and the light, God hurled the world; and God said: That's good!

Then God walked around, and god looked around on all that he had made. And God said: 'I'm lonely still.' And, with his head in his hands, God thought and thought, till he thought: I'll make me a man!

That's what I know about God the Father – Creator ("of heaven and earth").

Secondly, the Trinity tells us that God *trusted* the crown of his creation – that's *us* – to do the right thing - but we never did: failing miserably to live up to God's expectations. It was then he knew he had to do for us what we would never do for ourselves: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God; and the Word became flesh and lived among us – Why? Because God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life.' That's God - the "Son:" our Redeemer.

And, thirdly, God knew – even after all we did to his 'Word made flesh' – that he, somehow had to 'stay with us' – that we'd never make it on our own, so, he promised to give us an 'Advocate,' a helper - to be with us forever. 'You know him,' we're told by the risen Christ, 'because he abides with you, and he will be among you, and remind you of all that I have said to you.'

SOURCES CONSULTED

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and – oh yeah, don't forget: 'Lo, I am *with* you – even to the end of the Age.' *That's* God the Holy Spirit – our Sanctifier and Comforter.

All of that – from Creation to God's Presence with us now in the Holy Spirit - is based on *Love* and *Will* – it's nothing God *had* to do; God *did* it because of his great incalculable Love. But, it's still a mystery: 'God in 3 persons – blessed Trinity...'

C. S. Lewis once said that the most frequently spoken word in heaven is probably, "Oh".....like: "Oh, *now* I understand." or, "Oh! *Now* I see the reason for the trouble I had." Or, for *me*, it'll probably be: "Oh! *You're* here, *too?*..."

I can't explain the Trinity – don't even know if one *needs* to – it is a *human* construction after all: pieced together over the centuries from the images in Scripture. And, as St. Paul says in another place: "For now, we see through a mirror dimly and know only in part – but, someday we'll know in full – even as we are already fully known."

The problem is that *time* frame 'some day...' We've been so successful in unlocking things that were once unknown and explaining them and even adapting them to unbelievable uses that we've smugly concluded that our only *limitations* are time and energy, and – given enough of both, there is really nothing we can't ultimately know. And further: if we *can't* figure it out, it's not worth knowing. We're not even open to the possibility that there *are* those things that have always been - and probably always will be - mysteries to us...

The Trinity seems to be one of those. So *live* with it. And, the key word *there* is '*live*.'

Amen.