

God in se Trinity Sunday, Year B

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 3, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul, and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Trinity Sunday is unique in the Church Year. Throughout the year, we celebrate a number of Feasts of our Lord, relating specific events in the life of Christ to the life of the Church: Christmas, Easter, Epiphany, that sort of thing. We even celebrate several Feasts and Fasts related to the life of the Church itself: Pentecost last week being the prime example. But the Feast of the Trinity really celebrates not an event or even a person, but an *idea*.

Way back when I was in seminary, the unit of our systematic theology class in which we addressed the subject of the Trinity was interesting, if very long, and *very* confusing. The professor discussed all the historical development of the doctrine. He told us all about all the personalities involved in the debate. And he went on and on about all the heresies that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was meant to defend against.

It may surprise you to hear it, but the Trinity is not a *biblical* concept. The word “Trinity” appears nowhere in the Bible. There are only a *handful* of passages that even *mention* the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the same place. Over the first few centuries at the beginning of Christian thought, as the Church struggled with different understandings of the creative power of the Father, with different ideas of the meaning of the Son’s work of salvation, with competing concepts of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and in the lives of individual Christians, the Doctrine of the Trinity was constructed to help understand who God is. Or more accurately, the Doctrine of the Trinity was constructed to say who God is *not*.

First of all, the ancient Church said, and we say we believe still, we don’t worship some combination of gods, a god for this and a god for that. We might point to our pagan ancestors who had that sort of system down to a science, praying to one god for a plentiful harvest, another for victory in war, perhaps, and another for assistance in affairs of the heart. But there are plenty of folks around today who do essentially the same thing, this moment appealing to a God that has nothing to do with judgment and in the next to a god who is gladly willing to smite anyone who disagrees with our point of view. We try to define and redefine God as if we might change to a different form of God or a different way of appropriating God as easily as hitting the remote on our TV. As defined by the Doctrine of the Trinity our God is *one* God. God is not in competition. God is not in disagreement. God is not changeable.

Nor do we worship a God who created heaven and earth and then sat back to see what kind of mess we might make of it. From the beginning of the Church, there have been those that have asserted that the Father is a hands-off kind of guy, a skillful machine maker who then stepped back to watch how the gears would eventually wind down. There are perfectly logical sounding people, some of them publishing their work as Christian theology, that talk about this sort of god. They want to lay the burden of changing the world, or saving it, in the hands of humankind. To be sure, we have been given *our* work to do in carrying out God’s work on earth. But the Doctrine of the Trinity points to a Father who is, has always been, and continues to be deeply involved in creation – and especially in human hearts and souls.

Next, we don’t worship a God who wants nothing but to be our pal without regard to real truth or ultimate righteousness. Although it has been around for a *very* long time indeed, one of the more popular modern heresies has to do with a Jesus who was fully human yet something *less* than fully divine. There are plenty of religions out there that follow the teachings of this good man, or that wise teacher. All of them have much to tell us about how we might better live our lives. But the Jesus to whom the Church looks is more than a charismatic preacher, more than a wise moral teacher, more than a gifted worker of wonders. The Jesus to whom the Doctrine of the Trinity points is nothing *less* than the eternal Son of God.

We don't worship a God who is at our beck and call, the rabbit that pops out of our magic hat anytime we call, responding to our every desire, our every whim, our every demand. Some in the early Church down through today's world want to think of God much like the magic eight-ball some of you no doubt had when you were younger. Need the answer? Shake God up and turn him over and your answer will appear. Need a parking space? Send a prayer heavenward and one will pop open. The Doctrine of the Trinity points instead to the Holy Spirit that moved at the beginning of creation, the Spirit of power that descended on the disciples as the driven fire of Pentecost, and continues to enliven the Church today.

So, where does that put us? I hope that I may have been able to clear up a point or two for you about the Doctrine of the Trinity, ancient and modern. But other than tell us what God is *not*, other than putting a fence around Christian orthodoxy, what does the Doctrine of the Trinity really have to do with us? After having acted the professor for the last ten minutes or so, let me finally get down to what I really want to tell you about where the rubber of the Doctrine of the Trinity meets the road of the world in which you and I find ourselves.

When it comes right down to it, the Doctrine of the Trinity points *away* from all sorts of things. At the end of all that seminary teaching I heard so many years ago, in a "bull session" in the student lounge, my classmate and good friend, Andy Doyle, who's now the Bishop of Texas, cut right to the chase: "The Trinity's not really all that complicated," he said, "Ain't nothin' but a love thing!" The one thing that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity points *to* is that God, from the very beginning, from *before* the beginning, at his very core, God not alone but in perfect *relationship*. At the very *essence* of God's being, beyond all time, beyond all space, beyond whatever other limits our minds might begin to fathom, God has always been, God will always be, God always *is*... love itself. In saying that one thing, the Doctrine of the Trinity speaks volumes about who God is, and how it could be that we are so important to the Creator of all that is.

You see, we worship a God who creates not for something to do, but so that love itself can extend throughout the whole universe. We serve a God who redeems us, who calls us back to himself over, and over, and over again, not because some cosmic scale has to be put into balance, but because the greatest wound that God experiences, perhaps the only wound God *can* experience, is the fact that we so often turn our backs on him. We stand before a God who sustains us and the whole creation, not out of some obligation, or because of our sniveling, whining, petty demands, but out of unlimited, unqualified, *unending* love for us. We celebrate this feast today not just because this doctrine has saved the Church from the heresies of the past, not just because it can save us from the presumptions of the present, but because the Triune God of everything that is, seen and unseen, invites *us* to be part of the love that has been the very definition of God for all eternity, a love that can invigorate us and enliven us and empower us to finally reach beyond ourselves, to invite others to experience the joy of life in the living Father and Son and Holy Spirit. It is, after all, "nothin' but a love thing!"