

Trinity Sunday (2024)

A young woman, a wife of a local law enforcement agent, once asked me:

“When we speak of ‘Lord’, who are we talking about? Jesus or God?”

She had never heard of the doctrine of the Trinity, or if she had, she didn’t understand it.

She did not mention the Holy Spirit, but I am sure – if she had thought about it – this divine Person too would have been part of her perplexity.

Just to flesh out where she was coming from . . . this young woman had grown up in a rural church in this area served by a minister without any formal theological training. Very likely the Trinity never got mentioned, let alone explained.

So, it is not surprising that this believer – and she was a believer -- had questions. I was honored she brought them to me. I hope my answer brought some light and understanding.

I might say here, all of God's people – lay and ordained – need to be instructed in the faith. So that when people ask, they will have something to say. 1 Peter 3:15 gives us our marching orders:

“But sanctify [set apart] the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”

Moving on, the Trinity, briefly stated, is the Church's belief that God is one and God is three; three divine persons, one essence?

The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three Gods.

How did this belief come about? Frank Colquhoun, a clergyman of the last century, has written helpfully:

“The doctrine of the Trinity grew . . . out of the experience of the early Christians. It was their attempt to put into words what they had come to know of God in the face of Jesus Christ and in the light of Pentecost.”

The Trinity is better faced not as a riddle to be solved but as a condensed summary of everything we know about this Mystery called God.

More than that, it is a doctrine that relates to life -- your life, my life -- as we discover in today's Gospel. The message of this passage might be summed up under the words:
Revelation Redemption and Regeneration.

Let's begin with the first, **Revelation**. Unlike the other major world religions,

Christianity is not primarily about man's up-reach for God. Rather it is about God's down-reach for man.

We humans do reach up. That is the way we are wired. To quote the great Augustine of Hippo: **“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”**

In this regard, in our search for God, we can come to some conclusions by looking around us, most basically, that there is a Mind behind the universe. Just as the existence of a watch demands a watchmaker, so the existence of creation demands a Creator. Paul in Romans 1:20 says:

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead . . .”

We might further conclude that He prefers order over chaos. The stars and heavenly bodies moving in their appointed courses testify to this order.

Beyond this, we might deduce that He is an artist with an eye for beauty. The flowers of the field testify to this aspect of God.

But it would be hard to move much beyond these basic deductions. Other aspects of His being and purposes would have to remain a mystery. For example:

Is He good?

Does He prefer one type of behavior over another?

Why did He create what exists? Where do I fit into this picture?

What's wrong with the world? It's a place of beauty but also a place of cruelty.

The answers to these questions and others like them would remain unknown without revelation. By 'revelation', I mean God pulling back the curtain and showing us Himself. And that is exactly what God has done in the person Jesus of Nazareth.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus that His mission was to reveal 'heavenly things'.

But Jesus is not only our window into heaven. Out from revelation comes our second 'R' -- **redemption**.

Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus speaks of the need to be born from above.

Genesis 3, regardless of how you interpret the details, tells us something has gone wrong.

Right from the start, God's image-bearing creatures placed in the Garden to be wise caretakers, rebelled and became subject to sin and death. They – we – need to be reclaimed and put right. We need redemption.

This too was Jesus' mission, as He makes clear when He tells a story from Israel's ancient past, the story of snakes in the camp.

The children of Israel had been bitten and were dying. In response, God instructs Moses to make a model snake, set it on a pole very high and command all those who were dying to look and live.

This incident pointed forward to Jesus' own work and mission. He too would be lifted up on a tree so that everyone who looked might live.

It is here you and I come into the story. We are part of Adam's fallen race headed for death. We need rescue and healing. The Good News,

the Gospel, is that God has provided for our need.

Our part is to receive the free gift, to look to the cross -- the place our need and God's action met -- and live. Have you done that? Have you made the transaction personal? If not, say: "I believe you bore my sin, O Jesus. I receive your healing."

Our appetites and bad choices enslave. Jesus came to set the prisoner free. Let Him set you free.

Revelation, redemption . . . we now pass to our final 'R', **regeneration**.

Regeneration means new birth. Nicodemus thought because he was a descendant of Abraham and kept the Law that he was on the inside track with God. He did not need new life from above. That was what the Gentiles needed.

Jesus said, **“No, Nicodemus, you are wrong. You need not be born again.”** Why? /// Well, because as Paul would go on to say in Romans: **“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”** No one is excepted.

Who brings about this new birth, this change from the inside out? Jesus tells us. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Third Person of the Trinity is the agent of regeneration.

The same ‘Wind’ that blew over creation in the beginning and breathed life into the nostrils of man is on the move again.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth,” says Jesus, **“and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”** It is a mysterious and invisible operation, yet very real.

May this Wind blow over you and me today
bringing life from above.

May it blow over our nation bringing
renewal and revival.

May it blow over the world bringing hope
and healing and peace.

The Trinity is not for speculation. It's for
living and worship.

God above us, God beside us, God in us.

In response, we can only cry out: **Praise
God from whom all blessings flow . . . Praise
Him Father, Son and Holy Ghost.**

Happy Trinity Sunday!