

Call to Worship

The Trinity is a statement about the unique nature of the God who has come to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Today is a day for us to remember the Holy Trinity. **We remember: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

God's inner being is relationship, and we are created to live in relationship. **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united in love, and that relationship of love draws us to God.**

May the love of our Triune God embrace you in this time of worship. **That is our prayer. Amen.**

Prayer of Invocation

Glory and honor and praise to you, mighty God, creator, redeemer, and spirit. You are the source of life. We see you in Jesus, are lifted by your spirit, in you we live and move and have our being. Wait for us, walk with us, and speak to us with the words of life. These things we pray in your name! Amen.

The Word

John 14:8-14

Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him." **Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us."**

Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don't speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works.**

Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. **They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.**

Living the Word

Today we are celebrating Trinity Sunday. On the Liturgical calendar it happens a few weeks from now, the week after Pentecost, but we will be in our Summer Series: 'Celebrating Our Blessings' by then, and I didn't want to miss an opportunity to share this good news with you!

In the whole scheme of your lives filled with good and bad traumas and dramas, Trinity Sunday might not be a high priority, but it can be a blessing to you if you know more about it. Please note that humans have for centuries tried to explain and understand the Trinity, but as it is part of the mystery of God, we can only get a glimpse of God's meaning for us when we say that God is three persons in one.

Two friends were talking. The first one said "I've figured out the Trinity." The second one said "You have? That's one of the great mysteries of the faith." The first one piped in, "Sure! It's one of those 'three things' like – 'Larry, Moe & Curly' 'Peter Paul & Mary' 'Earth, Wind & Fire'. Then the reply came "UHH... You might be missing some of the finer points."

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity defines God, the Father; Jesus, the Son; and the Holy Spirit; "one God in three persons". The three persons are distinct, yet are of one substance, essence or nature. According to this central mystery of most Christian faiths, there is only one God - in three persons: while distinct from each another in their relations with one another, they are stated to be one in all else, co-equal, co-eternal and having the same substance as any other member of the Holy Trinity, and "each is God, whole and entire".

Accordingly, the whole work of creation and grace, it is seen as a single operation common to all three divine persons, in which each shows forth what is proper to them in the Trinity, so that all things are "from the Father", "through the Son" and "in the Holy Spirit" (repeat).

Three hundred years after Christ died and rose again, the first arguments for and against the concept of the Trinity began at the Council of Nicaea. Arch Bishop, Athanasius, argued for the Trinity. He believed that God from eternity is relational between the Father and the Son, for example, there was and is and always will be mutual self-giving. The unity within God is a unity of love, a unity in which the identity of each party is not swallowed up and destroyed or denied, but recognized.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism said: "Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; yet I have qualms using the word Trinity, because I do not find this term in the Bible." Today we don't have that same concern as the word trinity helps define the three as one. That Wesley did believe in. There are a few churches that call themselves Christian that do not believe in the Trinity. Some of them are: Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Unitarians.

The Doctrinal Standards of the United Methodist Church found in the Book of Discipline states – "United Methodists profess the historic Christian faith in God, incarnate in Jesus Christ for our salvation and ever at work in human history in the Holy Spirit." About the Trinity, our basic Christian Affirmation states: "With Christians of other communions we confess belief in the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Tri means three, as you saw on some of the slide pictures. The Holy Trinity is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The great Augustine had to reduce it to a simple illustration. He used the example of a tree. The root is wood; the trunk is wood; the branches are wood: one wood, one substance but three different entities.

We are not powerless in the world because we are not disconnected from our Creator God, or from God who sent Jesus to redeem us, or from God always acting in our lives through the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us, among us and sometimes outside of us. That is a remarkably wonderful gift to anyone who is feeling detached, isolated, alone, angry, deserted, depressed, grieving, hopeless, fearful, anxious, wounded, ashamed, and tired.

God is our Creator, all powerful, ever present, a God of love. The God of grace: which says that each one of us is loved beyond what any of us deserve. The movie "Heaven is for Real" is based on the book* of the same title, is the true story about a four-year old son named Colton of a small town Nebraska pastor who experienced heaven during emergency surgery.

At age four our minds are learning so many new things that we just accept it as truth because we trust those who feed us information. When Colton begins to share some of what he experienced he is

very matter-of-fact about it all. The revelations continue to come a little at a time from Colton. Here is what the father writes about one night, in bed, just before sleep, 'I asked him, "Hey, Colton, when you were in heaven did you see God's throne?" Colton looked at me quizzically. "What's a throne, Daddy?" "A throne is like the king's chair. It is the chair that only the king can sit in." "Oh, yeah! I saw that a bunch of times."

My heart sped up a little. Was I really going to get a glimpse into the throne room of heaven? "Well, what did God's throne look like?" "It was big, Dad...really, really big, because God is the biggest one there is. And he really, really loves us, Dad. You can't *belieeeeeve* how much he loves us!"

When he said this, a contrast struck me: Colton, a little guy, was talking about love. For one thing, God's size clearly wasn't scary to Colton, but it was also interesting to me that as eager as Colton was to tell about what God looked like, he was just as eager to tell me what God felt toward us...

Colton had already crawled underneath his blanket; his blond head nestled against a Spider-Man pillowcase. "Where did you sit, Colton?" I asked. "They brought in a little chair for me," he said, smiling. "I sat by God the Holy Spirit. Did you know that God is three persons, Dad?"

With all my heart, I wanted to believe. At that moment the details of our conversations began to pile up in my mind like a stack of polaroids – pictures of heaven that seemed uncannily accurate from the descriptions we all have available to us in the Bible – all of us who can read, that is. But these details were obscure to most adults, much less a kid of Colton's young age. The nature of the Trinity, the role of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. I believed. But how could I be sure?"

After I had read the book, a friend asked me if I wanted to see the movie. It is worth seeing, no matter what you understand about God. It is free on Amazon Prime or I have a copy of the book if someone wants to read it. I have a saying in my kitchen that says: "Don't tell God how big your storm is. Tell the storm how big your God is." How big is your God?

Jesus has said that he is the truth and the life; or we can say Jesus is the way to God, Because Jesus was sent to tell us the truth of God and show us the way to God. We know Jesus as the Redeemer through his work as the teacher, his death on the cross and his revelation to us of eternal life.

Jesus told us to go out and baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are immersed in the whole being of God, whether we understand it or not. If we were baptized only in the Holy Spirit, missing would be the acknowledgement of the awesome creation of the Father and our redemption through the Son.

Three in one: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer

Jesus' own baptism is often interpreted as an expression of all three persons of the Trinity: "And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28, verse 19 Jesus says "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Ah, then there is the **Holy Spirit**, or as Wesley called it, the Holy Ghost. Before Jesus left the disciples, he spoke of another, an advocate, besides himself who comes to us from God: in John

chapter 14, verse 26 Jesus says: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

And again in John chapter 15, verse 26 he says about the work of the Holy Spirit: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me." To be a student of Christ and be immersed in the fullness of God goes hand in hand. We cannot become or help others become students of Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit depends on what and who Jesus was and is for us. Christ keeps pointing to the Father, so that is where the power comes from via the Holy Spirit. It is in the Trinity, the fullness of God, that we must find ourselves as Christian students. At this point you may still doubt with Thomas, who is quite literally, lost; and Phillip is not far behind. Their questioning reveals how little we can comprehend of the God, who has come down to us in Jesus Christ.

Wesley also wrote: "For instance: God said, let there be light: And there was light." I believe it: I believe the plain fact: There is no mystery at all in this. The mystery lies in the manner of it. But of this I [understand] nothing at all; nor does God require it of me. Again: "The Word was made flesh." I Believe this fact also. There is no mystery in it; but as to the manner how he was made flesh, wherein the mystery lies, I know nothing about it; I believe nothing about it: It is no more the object of my faith, than it is of my understanding.

To apply this to the case before us: There are three that bear record in heaven: And these three are One. I believe this fact also, that God is Three and One. But the manner how, I do not comprehend. Now in this, in the manner, lies the mystery; and so it may; I have no concern with it: It is not the object of my faith: I believe just so much as God has revealed, and no more.

But this, the [how and why], he has not revealed; therefore, I believe nothing about it. But would it not be absurd in me to deny the fact, because I do not understand the manner? That is, to reject what God has revealed, because I do not comprehend what he has not revealed. But the thing, which I here particularly mean is this: The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith; with all vital religion."

At a Continuing Education Conference a number of years ago, one of the speakers said that we each relate more to one or another of the three in the Trinity. You may know people who speak only of Jesus in their faith, and others, who live more in the power of the Holy Spirit. Personally, I relate more to God.

The awesomeness of Creation and the vastness of the Creation, which continues to happen around us, captures it all for me. I still talk to Jesus every day and call on the Holy Spirit as well. They are all three of importance in our lives, but it is God that I cling to. Take a moment and think, if in your mind, do you find more importance in God...Jesus...or the Holy Spirit? Do you envision one more than the others when you pray or when you praise?

Each has a different part to play in our knowledge of and belief in God. Each have different tools to give us peace beyond understanding in even the most bizarre situations of life. They have the answers to 'how' for us each day, and the answers for 'why' – waiting for us in the great beyond someday. We have to trust them enough to work in their timing and not always in our own.

Still they are 'all for one and one for all': Have you ever noticed that the name Lord is used interchangeably for God and for Jesus? If we say that the Lord of my life is Jesus, is that just the man who lived and died and rose again or is it also the Holy Spirit who interacts in us on behalf of Jesus as he said it would? So my understanding is that when I say 'Lord', I am praying to all three sides of God. Possibly we forget the Holy Spirit because it is as difficult to define as the image of God, but it is the part of God that is active in us with every breath we take.

This week's reading is at the end of the book of John; Jesus' final words to the disciples before he ascends into heaven. He wants to make sure that they understand that the Father is in him, or a part of all that he is, just as he is a part of the Father. All that Jesus has done is by the creation of God. The next words give this same opportunity for us to live with the Trinity as a part of our lives. "*I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.*"

We have been given the Trinity, God – our Creator, Jesus – our redeemer and the Holy Spirit who will sustain us, as a blessing to guide our thoughts and actions. All we have to do is believe, and ask, and they are ours. When you pray to one, you are praying to all three. I am not sure if they hand off the prayers according to the need.

Imagine if you will: The prayer request comes in to the great switchboard in the sky, whatever that may look like... God says "Joe (because God knows us all personally) is asking for the strength to face today. This one is for you Holy Spirit. Send some power of confidence in himself... Sally is asking forgiveness for the mess she has made with her family; Jesus that one is yours. Let her know that you have already forgiven her and now she needs to forgive herself and talk to her family.

Be sure to add that you will be going with her every step of the way...And I will take William, who can't seem to see anything beyond himself and I will show him once again the wonders of the earth and sky to remind him how small he is in the whole scheme of things, but how important his part is to play in order for the kingdom to come together."

What if we could take every little worry, every little concern, every joy – big and small, to God and receive a response? Then we would know that we are never in this alone. The Bible says we can. We have a lifetime to live into all of this. Just think, the disciples only had three years with Jesus to change all of the understandings that they had been raised with. Many of us on the other hand have already had most of our lifetime learning about God, and we are still reluctant to believe how great a gift we have been given in the Trinity.

And there are many people 'out there' who are not getting any of this as they grow up, they will take time to convince about God as three persons, who is there to lead and guide their lives in the good times and the bad. We have a daunting task, yet Jesus says if we will believe, we can do even greater works than he did. Now that is just plain scary. I have often wondered how much power the Holy Spirit has for us that we ignore?

I invite you this week to define in your heart and mind how you understand the Trinity and if you believe enough to let God empower you to do great things in your life.

*Burpo, Todd. Heaven is For Real. Nashville: Thompson Nelson, 2010.