

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend Jonathon W. Jensen, Rector**  
**Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**  
**Trinity Sunday**  
**May 31, 2015**

Trinity Sunday is the feast celebrating our belief, our understanding of God. It is a doctrine - which is an attempt to explain an idea that is, by nature, inexplicable. Often one hears creative or confusing attempts to try to explain it.  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ . God as Trinity is like H<sub>2</sub>O - water, ice, and steam. Or an apple with a peel, meaty inside, and a core. Or Saint Patrick's famous explanation. Patrick would hold up a shamrock and challenge his hearers, "Is it one leaf or three?" "It is both one leaf *and* three," was their reply. "And so it is with God."

While all these explanations are somewhat interesting, in varying degrees, they aren't very helpful in actually relating *to* God. All of these keep the holy abstract and distant which is the *last* thing the doctrine or idea of the Trinity is really about.

What the Trinity attempts to do is make a statement about *who* and *what* God is - recognizing any statement about the divine is limited. If our understanding is difficult now - imagine what it must have been like to develop the doctrine in the first place. It was clearly the product of a committee. The Council of Nicea developed, in the fourth century, the basis of it - what we know as the Nicene Creed - the one we say each week after the sermon.

What those faithful people were trying to do was to reconcile their *inherited* belief in God as one - with their *experience* of God. Along with the one known as Father, from their Jewish roots, they also experienced the divine as incarnate or in the flesh in Jesus Christ. They further experienced the presence of God as the Holy Spirit moving in their lives and the world. The reconciliation was a difficult task. The word Trinity does not even appear in the Bible. Our Scripture reading today mentioned Father, Son, and Spirit. They had to make sense of what they inherited with what they experienced and integrate them. Don't we all do this in our own lives?

We have inherited many images of God from the Bible that we ignore usually focusing on a few. God is often viewed as Father or a judge sitting on a throne. But God is also portrayed in the Bible as a mother hen brooding over her chicks. Or as a mother who comforts her children. (Isaiah 66:12-13) Or a warrior who also comes in a still small voice. God is further portrayed as a mighty wind, fire, creator, redeemer, and the order that holds the universe together. The doctrine of the Trinity of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit holds all these images together. They are meant to be broad so we do not try to limit the limitless.

This doctrine raises an important question for us. With all these inherited, biblical images of God, do any of these reconcile with the God of your *own* experience? Who or what is God to you? Numerous surveys show that most Americans believe in some kind of deity but it may or may not be Trinitarian in nature. Is it *only* a Creator or Higher Power or Supreme Being? Is God like some super parent who does for us, if we pester him enough, what we cannot do for ourselves? Is it some perfect ideal to which we aspire? Who or what is God to you? How do you reconcile what we have inherited with what you have experienced of the holy?

For much of the history of the church, we have been trying to address the question of how a person can be saved. The question assumes some belief in an afterlife or a need to be saved from Hell or to Heaven. To answer what must I do to be saved, it is important to have a correct belief in God to assure that salvation. The Trinity has been used as part of the correct answer to a question many people aren't asking any more. Many of us are likely asking different questions entirely even if they are not articulated - How can I have a better life for myself and my family? What is a good or meaningful life and how is God or church part of that? What is true, beautiful, and good?

The Trinity reveals that the essence of God is a loving relationship. How can I have a better life? All of us, from an early age, have a need to be loved. As we mature we recognize that we also need to *give* love. We are this way because we are created in the image of God. Love must have a subject and an object - the lover and the beloved. The formers of the doctrine of the Trinity understood this well.

God is both lover and beloved. That's what the idea of the Trinity tries to help us understand. Love is present and complete in God flowing throughout the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Lord pours that out generously and abundantly on all of creation. Participating in that perfect, divine love is the good and meaningful life that God models and offers to each of us.

When we recognize that we are loved perfectly and without qualification by God, we can then love others and ourselves as God does - a life with purpose, meaning, and hope.