

## Trinity Sermon (Isaiah 6:1-8; John 16:12-16)

Holy trinity, the mystery at the centre of our Christian faith. What does it say about God? What does it say about us? The doctrine of the Trinity itself is not found explicitly in scripture, yet, it is scriptural to its core. It is the result of the church's 250 years of reflecting on scripture and on its experience of God's self-revelation as those encounters and the church's continuing experience of God over us, with us, and in us are recorded in scripture.

Have you ever tried to explain the Trinity? Or even to understand it? God is one and yet we've got these three, what? Persons? Spirits? Beings? Things? So what is God? A triangle, maybe a prism, but with three sides? Maybe God is like the Greek God Janus, the one with two faces, except that the Christian God has three faces. Or maybe God is a shape-shifter, one minute holy parent, another holy child, another holy spirit. "God in three persons," ....or as one theology professor put it: "God in three hypostatic modes of being." Defining the Trinity is no easy task.

Once a year we are challenged to think hard about the threefold nature of God revealed to us by our Bible as the Holy Trinity. God is one is written in Scripture: *shema yisrael, adoni eloheynu, adoni echod*, that translates to "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." This ancient confession from Deuteronomy is foundational to all that we say about God: God is one in essence, unity, being, power, holiness and purpose.

We talk so much about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that we need to remind ourselves that they are three portions of the one reality we call God, the One the prophet Isaiah encounters in the temple in Jerusalem. Isaiah catches but a glimpse of the hem of God's robe and even that is so imbued with God's holiness that Isaiah must turn away

his eyes, crying out, “Woe is me.”

One of the things said in our first reading, central is the vision of God’s holiness: God’s wholly, entire, otherness, God’s separateness. That is what holy means. God within God’s self is so separate from everything else in existence, so different, that we simply have no reference for God, no analogy that will suffice.

Theologians know that every metaphor for God eventually breaks down. God is like... but not like...; nothing in creation is comparable to God. Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me, I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet, my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” God is holy, and wholly other than us, yet is also for us and present to us.

This one God is indivisible in being, purpose and work. God is one. Yet, this one God has revealed God’s self to us in three different ways: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The western church has called each of these ways “persons,” not to differentiate them as individual gods, but to identify them as the three different ways God has revealed God’s self to us, as well as the three different ways the three are related to one another within the unity of God’s being- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Father: the Father is the Father, not because God is a male; God is beyond all gender, male or female, nor because the first person of the Godhead is like a father. For nothing in the created order is suitable for defining God and capturing God’s essence, save what God gives us. We call the first person Father because this is the Father of the Son and the source of the Spirit. We call the first person of the Godhead “Father” because this is what Jesus called him and taught us to call him in Jesus’ name. Through Jesus, the One Jesus called “Abba” - “Father,” is also

“Our Father” - the source of all that is.

Son: we call the second person of the Godhead “Son” because he comes from the Father, was sent by God as God’s incarnation to reveal God to us - to be God with us - to live out his life with and for us as one of us. He was not a hologram; he was flesh and blood. We know Jesus as the Son not only because he was male and flesh, but as the gospel of John confesses, because of his life lived out in filial obedience to his Father. And as Jesus prepares to return to his Father, he promises another Advocate - the Spirit of God, the Holy spirit - the present tense of God.

The Spirit of God is the wind of God, that Jesus spoke of in today’s gospel. It blows where it will. Its work is to give new birth from above, to transform, renew, sustain, to make us children of God. The Spirit is the lifeline through whom the risen Son is present to us in life. The Holy Spirit is the wireless connection between us and the Son and us and the Father because they are “hard-wired” together in the one essence we call God. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit, but the Father, Creator of heaven and earth. The Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit, but God in human flesh, sent as the Saviour to redeem the world through divine love. The Spirit is neither the Father nor the son, but God’s present tense with us now, the means through whom you and I come to experience and know God, and who initiates within us the desire and ability to call out to God.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit - three distinct means of God and being, over and above us, with and for us, and in and among us, and three distinct relationships with one another, who are nonetheless one in essence, will, purpose, and work. What one wills all three will, what one does all three do - they work in concert, the three playing their different parts - three

voices emerging from the same string at the same time, forming a trio of melodies that harmonize into one glorious sound, in order to accomplish the same purpose, as indivisible in their work as they are in their being - One God in three co-equal persons.

It has been said that every Christian heresy is, in essence, a Trinitarian heresy which has resulted from our separating the will and the work of the one member of the Godhead from the other two. What One wills all Three will, and what One does all Three do. And so, although we call the Father Creator of heaven and earth, the Son and the Spirit were also present at creation, working as co-equals in God's work.

We have another problem in the western Church, especially in the Protestant traditions, and that is we tend to think of God from the top down. Rather than identify Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three-coequals who, in the community of mutual love and essence, are One God, we think of the Father as the One who is really God, with the Son and the Spirit subordinates that the Father sends forth to do God's work, as though they were divine footmen. That gets us into the craziness of the loving Son offering his life as a guilt offering to appease an angry and vengeful Father.

Or we think of the Father as someone separated and disconnected from the Son and Spirit. When we remember that God is father, Son and Spirit, co-equals bound in the unity of their mutual love and divine essence, it becomes clear what Jesus is saying: he and the Father and the Spirit are One. We simply cannot encounter one without the other. Jesus is the one in the Godhead whose role it is to reveal God and reconcile us to God, to be the one through whom we are able to enter God's Holy presence, and the spirit is the one who Transports us there.

There's a story about a pastor, who while trying to write a sermon on the Trinity decided to ask her kind, thoughtful and very smart husband, Tom, how she might define the Trinity. His response? "What's the point of talking about the Trinity? It's the most useless doctrine in all of Christianity," which, on the face of it sounds pretty cynical. And anyone who has written a sermon on the subject, would almost be inclined to agree. Jesus didn't talk about the Trinity, neither did Paul, but they did talk quite extensively about the Spirit. For Isaiah, Spirit got him moving and participating in God's work again. For Paul, Spirit told us something important about who we really were that we did not know before. Spirit works personally and intimately in our lives with truths to reveal more of who we are meant to be in the world. It is Spirit who makes wholistic sense and meaning out of God and Jesus. Spirit with no definite article in front of it is the name of the third person of the Holy Trinity.

What kernels of truth might we glean by continuing with this concept of the Trinity? Dissatisfied with Tom's initial response to her query about the Trinity, Jane followed, or chased Tom around the house asking him questions. In the kitchen, "If the idea of the Trinity is so useless, why has it stuck around so long?" In the den: "Useless, totally useless?" In the tiny corner in the basement Tom thought she didn't know about: "Father-Son-Holy Spirit? Creator - Redeemer - Sustainer? I end all my sermons with that Trinitarian formula! Has it all really been for naught? Surely there's something helpful about the idea of the Trinity?"

Maybe it was having his back to the basement wall that did it. But as her last question hung between them, she saw the light bulb click on. Tom's eyes widening, he said: "The Trinity reveals the creative, the ethical, and the mystical." In response to her theologically astute, "HUH?" he went on. "The essence of God is creative. That's what God does. God creates. And Jesus' whole thing was doing good; God sent Jesus to

show us how to live, that's ethics. And the mystical? The mystical is all the Spirit stuff; prayer, meditation, being fully present with God, with ourselves, and with others."

By this time, Tom was so excited, that he was following or chasing Jane around the house. "And the important thing about the Trinity," he continued, "Father - Son - Holy Spirit, creative - ethical - mystical, however you name it, the important thing about the Trinity is that all three partners go together, all three are equal, mutually-related, interdependent." At that point, he took a breath, which she took as her cue to make a run for it.

"And tell them about the image of God!" he yelled after her. ("You tell them about the image of God," she thought.) But, she asked sweetly: "What about the image of God?" "Well, the image of God," Tom said, "is this mutual balance of creative, ethical, and mystical...and since we're created in the image of God..."

Then she got it. Since God's essence is the three-way dance of creative, ethical, and mystical, and since we are created in God's image, then we are whole, which is to say, most God-like when the creative, ethical, and mystical, dance interdependently in our lives. And when the creative, or imaginative thinking; the ethical, what we do and how we decide to do it; and the mystical, how we pray; when the creative, the ethical, and the mystical dance interdependently in our lives, then we are dancing with the Trinity.

So what does this Trinity dance look like? It looks a lot like the Stations of the Cross wall hangings in the chapel at the sisters of Zion hostel in Ein Karem, Israel. The Sisters of Zion established the hostel specifically to minister to Jewish people. "We are there as a sign of God's love for

the Jews,” the sisters proclaim. In the hostel, the sisters play host to Jews and to anyone who needs a place to stay.

In their continuing efforts to establish relationships with and minister to Jewish people in the community, the sisters once commissioned a local artist, a Jew to create a plaster set of the Stations of the Cross. Once the beautiful abstract paintings were complete, the sisters proudly displayed them in the chapel. Then the Bishop came to visit. Saying that it was disrespectful for a Jew to create artwork depicting the Stations of the Cross, he ordered the stations removed. With great sorrow, the sisters took them down.

But, when the bishop died, one of the sisters told her visitors, smiling broadly, “we put them back!” Through their life of prayer, the sisters opened themselves to the creativity of God’s spirit, a Jew to create Christian art. Who would have thought it? And not only did they think it, they also acted on it. They did something to demonstrate God’s love for the Jews. And even when thwarted by an uncreative bishop, the sisters’ creative, ethical, mystical dance continued even though it had to go underground for a while.

What does our Trinity dance look like? What happens when our creating or imagining, our doing, and our praying all get going at the same time? What might that dance look like? How might that dance help us live into the reality of that famous verse from John’s Gospel. “ For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

What might happen if we lived truly Trinitarian lives; creative, ethical, and mystical? Shall we dance? In the name of our God who creates us, sustains us, and hopes for our wholeness. **Amen.**

## PRAYERS FOR HOLY TRINITY SUNDAY - JUNE 4, 2023

Holy, holy, holy God, in calling forth creation from the void, revealing yourself in human flesh, and pouring forth your wisdom to guide us, you manifest your loving concern and care for your whole universe. You invite us, as your people, to gather the world's needs into our hearts and bring them before you, saying: Come Holy Spirit ... **Hear our prayers.**

For the Church: that we may recognize our call to be children of God; to be united in fellowship through the Holy Spirit and to encourage one another as we follow God's call in our lives; for a spirit of wonder and awe: that we may behold the marvellous deeds of God in nature, in relationships, and within ourselves and be motivated to serve God with greater commitment and sincerity.  
Come Holy Spirit ... **Hear our prayers.**

For new vision and understanding: For a deeper appreciation of God's covenant of love: that we who were once "no people" have become God's own and that we may live each day as daughters and sons of God: For peace: that God will bring new courage to leaders of nations working for peace and ending injustice.  
Come Holy Spirit ... **Hear our prayers.**

For the grace to live in peace and harmony: that God will help us accept the differences in one another, understand the richness of gifts that others bring, and give us patience as we strive to work together. For a new experience of grace and mercy in our lives: that God's love will free us from our past failures, give us courage to make amends, and hope to begin again in our relationships.  
Come Holy Spirit ... **Hear our prayers.**

For all who are isolated from God and the human family: that they may experience welcome and acceptance as they encounter the Christian community; For a greater sense of community: that we may appreciate the wonder of each person and work together to address



the needs and longings of all who enter our lives.  
Come Holy Spirit ... **Hear our prayers.**

For all who are discouraged, lonely, suffering and ill that the Spirit of God's love will strengthen them and bring them to wholeness quickly; for all whose lives are disrupted by violence: For all who have lost homes and community and become refugees: that God will protect them, guide them to food and shelter and help them to develop a new life with new relationships surrounded by support and community.  
Come Holy Spirit ... **Hear our prayers.**

For all who have been affected by wildfires, those evacuated in Nova Scotia as the fires near Halifax, those experiencing growing fires in Quebec; those evacuated in Alberta and Northern British Columbia; for all the fire fighters, first responders, volunteers taking care of the evacuated; for those who have lost their homes, animals and means of livelihood in the fires: that God protect and console them and help them to rebuild their lives.

Come Holy Spirit ... **Hear our prayers.**

Holy, holy, holy God, fill us with strength and courage, with discernment and compassion, that we may be your instruments of justice and love in this world, that it may be on earth as it is in heaven.  
**Amen.**

God in Community, Holy in One, make us one Body from many as we pray as Jesus teaches us, saying,  
**Our Father ...**