

Matthew 28:16-20 - Holy Trinity Sunday

Today we celebrate the Holy Trinity, which is probably the greatest mystery of our faith. The Feast of the Holy Trinity was introduced into the church year at a comparatively late date. In the eleventh century, only local dioceses observed the festival. In the twelfth century, Pope Alexander II discouraged the observance of the day, believing it unnecessary, since each day of the church's worship was an occasion to proclaim the Holy Trinity. In 1332, however, Pope John XXII ordered the festival to be universally observed, and we continue that celebration to this day.

The observance of the Holy Trinity is unique in the church year in that it is the only festival that is based on a doctrine, rather than a specific historical event. The Bible does indeed refer to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- however, in no place in the Bible is the word Trinity mentioned. Thus, when we formulate doctrines of the Trinity; when we worship God as Trinity; when we greet, bless, and baptize in the name of the Triune God; we do this all with great humility, realizing our God is so much more than all of this.

A little boy came home from Vacation Bible School and told his mother that the pastor had said that God was everywhere. "That's true," his mother responded. "Is he in the oven when it's hot?" "Yes," replied the mother. "How about in the cupboard?" "Yes," said the mother. "How about in the fridge when the door is closed and light is off?" "God's there

too," replied the mother. "How about in the sugar bowl?" asked the boy, as he took the lid off the bowl. "Well, I suppose he's there, too." answered the mother. The boy slammed the sugar bowl shut and announced triumphantly: "Got him!" Of course, the mother had a lot more explaining to do.

As humorous as this story may be, there is some truth in it as to how people view God. Far too often, we view God very much like the little boy did - we think that God is small enough for us to put God into a tidy package, which we are able to control and understand completely. We want a God of our own making, on our own conditional terms, and a God who will cater to our needs at our every beck and call - a cosmic bell-hop God - a butler God - or a fairy Godfather.

Rather than accepting the fact that we humans are created in God's image, we want to create a God in our version of the human image. We want a sanitized, tame God - we ourselves want to be God and to master over our God.

This temptation, to create the one, true God into our own image is the oldest and most dangerous trap known to humankind. It goes back to the story of the Fall in the Bible, resulting in a sinful human condition, which distorts our relationship with God as well as our view of God.

We will never be able to capture God; not in a sugar bowl - and not in a

neat package of our own making. God will always be more than our words and doctrines, more than our beliefs and expressions of worship, more than our purest intentions and actions. There is a tremendous mystery about God, that is so awesome and overwhelming that we are unable to grasp it. Our mysterious, wondrous God is far greater than our capacities to adequately explain or understand Him.

We see three faces of God, but we have only one God. Each face of God tells us something about God. God, the father, creator tells about the God of the universe, God who creates, God who is powerful. God, the son, Jesus, shows us the love of God, the saving, redeeming quality of God. Then we have God, the Spirit who shows us the God who is with us through all circumstances of our lives. God the spirit brings the Father and the Son into our very souls, hearts, and minds.

How one plus one plus one equals one remains a great mystery. The relationships that exist between the three persons, yet one Godhead are not spelled out in detail in the Bible. Thus, the Triune God is best known in and through a life of worship and service, rather than in remote doctrines. The Holy Spirit working in and through the Word and Sacraments helps us to know and see Jesus. When we see and know Jesus, we know God.

So, how can we explain God the Holy Trinity? Desmond Tutu, in his book, *Hope and Suffering*, tells the following story:

"A simple Russian country priest was confronted by an eminent scientist. This chap trotted out apparently devastating arguments against the existence of God and declared, "I don't believe in God." The unlettered priest retorted quickly, "Oh, it doesn't matter - God believes in you." That is what Jesus says to us - God believes in you."

God believes in us all. Because God believes in us all, we are able to worship and serve God the Holy Trinity. Some question the doctrine of the Holy Trinity because no Bible passage expresses it in the words in which we confess it; namely, that there is only one God and yet there are three distinct persons, equal in every respect yet different. There is no chapter or verse where this teaching is spelled out.

But, faith is never an intellectual exercise that makes the mind jump through certain hoops to arrive at certain conclusions about God. God is not some almighty power we can engineer and manipulate. In Jesus Christ, God demonstrates the true divine nature.

God is the loving God who overcame divine wrath toward us sinners. God sent the Son to die for our sins and raised him to life that in him we might have life. What we know about God in Jesus Christ is enough for us to understand God's feelings toward us, compelling us to trust and love God in return. God makes faith possible by what God has done for us and made known to us, not what we can dream up about God as a philosophical formula. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit will be with us,

says Paul. That is another way of saying that this great God whom the heavens and earth cannot contain has the ability to live with us and in us in Spirit.

In our gospel, we heard the words of the Great commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

And it is the part of the Trinity that is the Holy Spirit which brings Christ to us throughout the ages. The Holy spirit is often misunderstood. Some like to claim it as their spirit which brings them special gifts. Others like to ignore it, and others can take it or leave it.

But it is that Spirit who brings Christ, the Saviour into our lives. How, we don't know! But we do know that Christ's Spirit of love, mercy and redemption is in our lives. But, sometimes we take that power of the Spirit in our lives for granted. We think of it as some sort of magic. "Well, I came to church today, so everything is OK, I took communion, so I am OK for now," and on and on it goes.

A pastor tells about an event that occurred in his church in Brooklyn, N.Y. "I was doing duty in the narthex, keeping the sanctuary open for visitors and meditation when a man came in and asked if he could light

a candle. Before I could respond aye or nay he quickly added, "By the way, what kind of church is this?" "Lutheran," I replied, prepared to define it and candles a bit more precisely, when he smiled and said, "Not that it makes any difference. I don't favour any particular kind of religion. Whenever I pass a church I like to light a candle and plug into the divine. Any God will do!!"

Plug into the divine, like it is magic, a kind of pill that will keep us safe and sound. But, being in the Spirit is more than magic, it takes commitment. Since Jesus was willing to give His life for us, doesn't He deserve more than our passing fancy with Him and the Spirit? Doesn't he deserve more than our being plugged in when it suits us or reassures us?

John Brokhoff, in his book, "*Jesus...Who*" writes, "To have the Spirit is to have God in us, in our hearts, minds and persons. God is not to be found in nature, only evidence of his reality. God is not to be found in social events or historical acts. We can see only evidence of God. You see, God is a Spirit and only a human can have the Spirit. A human is body and soul. The soul is within the body. Within the soul is the spirit. The soul is like a container for the Spirit. In the person of the Spirit, God is truly with us and in us."

What he is saying is that God can only be found in us, period. So we need to be committed to have the Spirit, to have God within us, to have

the Spirit within us. Then we can fulfill that Great Commission to tell others about the Spirit who is within us.

The sort of relationship God wants from us is illustrated in the following story. "There was a little church in Scotland. One Sunday, many years ago, as the ushers were returning to the altar with the offering plates, a little boy sitting next to the aisle tugged at the sleeve of one of the ushers and whispered, 'Please, put the plate down on the floor.' Bewildered, the usher obeyed. Then the boy proceeded to step into the plate. That may sound a little strange. Our first reaction would be, "What kind of prank is this kid playing?" But, this was the little boy's way of saying to Jesus, "I give my whole self to you, not only the money in my pocket, but my time, my strength, my whole life." Wow! Unbelievable, isn't it? This boy was Robert Moffat, the great missionary to Africa and the father-in-law of David Livingstone."

Are we, any one of us, willing to step into the offering plate? To give of ourselves so that the Spirit of God can rest in us and then we can proclaim that Spirit to the world? Can we as a church, as God's beloved children, do this? Perhaps. But - how? And what are we to do and who is to do it?

Do you remember the anxiety you felt in school when the teacher announced that there was going to be a GROUP PROJECT? Most of us probably hated group projects, for two basic reasons. First, we were

given this huge responsibility that would be worth a big chunk of the mark for the course, but we did not have the authority to make sure that the other group members did their share of the work! The hard working kids discovered that if they wanted to get a good grade, then they had to do all the work. But those good grades came at a price. For the achievers, the cost of a good grade wasn't simply doing the lion's share of the work. The price of a good grade was the anger and frustration of having a heavy responsibility, but no authority to go with it. You couldn't force the others to do their share or control the marks assigned.

The second reason group projects were detested was that quite often, a group had a member who thought that he or she was better at everything than everyone else, and so that one person would hog all the work. You would go to the group meeting and leave with nothing to do because the control-freak wanted to do it all. Sure, the grade would be good, but that good grade again, came with a price. In that group, the price of a good grade was the boredom of having the authority to do something, but no responsibility.

Responsibility without authority leads to frustration and anger. Authority without responsibility leads to apathy and boredom. We see this in the business world as well. Frustrated and angry workers will not be as creative and innovative as they can be. Bored and apathetic workers will not be as productive as they should. There is a tremendous toll to pay when there is responsibility without authority and authority without

responsibility: neither the person nor the organization will reach their potential.

This also is true in the church. Hundreds, and even thousands of churches are pastored by frustrated and angry clergy who feel the responsibility to make their churches grow and to ensure that all these wonderful ministries are done, yet have no authority to make their parishioners work - it's a volunteer organization.

On the other side of the pulpit, there are hundreds of thousands of apathetic and bored church members who feel that they have the God given authority to make a difference in the world through the church, but are never given meaningful responsibility by the pastor.

The church of Jesus Christ is littered with pastors who are burned out because of overwork and lay people who have rusted out due to being left on the side of the road with nothing significant to do. The result is that the pastors and the people are not achieving their full potential - and neither is the church as a whole. That's not what Jesus wants for us.

When Jesus gathered his disciples together for the last time he told them: "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you."

If a church is going to reach its full potential, it has to take these words of Jesus seriously. Look at what Jesus said. He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations." Listen to the words: "Go and make." Jesus gave his disciples a tremendous responsibility - go to the whole world and help people develop a deep and abiding friendship with Jesus. Jesus gave the responsibility for making disciples to the disciples.

And what kind of people were his disciples?

Some had been fishermen, one had been a tax collector, one had been a political extremist. Not a one of them was a priest or a pastor or religious professional. They were what we today refer to as laity - lay men and women. Remember, there were more priests and pastor types in Jesus' day than you could shake a stick at. But, Jesus entrusted this world-changing responsibility to the laity.

And, not only did Jesus give his disciples responsibility, he also gave them authority. Jesus said that God had given him complete authority in heaven and earth. Jesus did not jealously guard that authority and keep it for himself, but instead conferred that authority upon his disciples. Early in his time with the disciples, Jesus called them together and "gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness" and then sent them out to do ministry.

Jesus gave them responsibility, and he also gave the authority to do what he assigned them. Jesus gave the whole church the responsibility of making disciples and he also conferred that authority to make disciples upon the whole church. When clergy release the authority to act and when the laity accept the responsibility for ministry - when we truly embrace the words - the priesthood of all believers - the church becomes an unstoppable force that reaches its full potential in Jesus Christ.

It is because God the Father has revealed love and grace in the Son through the Spirit, that our Lord urges us to share this experience. "Go therefore," Christ says, "and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

As you leave this morning and prepare to begin a new week - Remember! God the Father believes in us! God the Son redeems and loves us! God the Holy Spirit abides in us always and forever! We are indeed a blessed people - blessed by God the Trinity. Let us share this Triune God with family members, with our neighbours, our friends, our co-workers - our world.

Amen!

THE PRAYERS FOR TRINITY SUNDAY JUNE 15, 2025

Holy, holy, holy God, in calling forth Creation from the void, in revealing yourself in human flesh, and in pouring forth your wisdom to guide us, you manifest your continuous caring concern for your whole universe. You invite us, as your people, to gather the world's needs into our hearts and bring them before you.

Holy God, we give thanks for the dreams you place in our lives -- dreams of safer spaces and places to call home. Hope for people to come together and work towards creating communities that nurture and heal rather than hurt. Visions of bringing about positive, life-giving change and putting love before anything else. We pray for the places around our world where dreams of peace, hope, and love feel unattainable or like a distant memory.

We pray for the Church universal: 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. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; for our Bishops Susan and Kathy, Bishop Anna, acting Anglican Primate Anne Germond. We pray for the upcoming conference of the Anglican Church in Canada. Guide and inspire them in their deliberations. We pray for the congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Azar and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. We pray for the congregation of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran in Comox; our seminaries in Saskatoon and Waterloo and for all faculty, staff and seminary students; our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. Bless the ministries of all pastors, priests, deacons, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

We pray for a spirit of wonder and awe: that we may behold your marvellous deeds in nature, see you reflected in relationships and within ourselves, and be motivated to serve You with greater commitment and sincerity. We dream of a day when restoration and hope will be all that we seek, as we lean into a more loving way of life. We pray for the healing of our Earth, the protection of vulnerable communities, and the care of all.

We pray for new visions and understanding: for a deeper appreciation of God's eternal covenant of love: that we, who, through our baptism, have become God's own, may live each day as siblings in Christ. We pray for the grace to live in peace and harmony: that God will help us accept the differences in one another, understand the 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.

We pray for all who are isolated from God and the human family: that they may experience welcome and acceptance as they encounter the Christian community, especially our 2SLGBTQIA+ siblings. We pray 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.

Holy God, we give you thanks for our own families, remembering our own fathers or those who stood in their place, who took care of us, who met our needs, giving us love and security. For the love of those who are still with us and for the fatherly love that you show us, we give you thanks.

We pray for fathers who cannot provide for their children and their families: where relationships are estranged; where daily needs are unmet due to lack of work, or opportunities, for fathers who feel inadequate as they are stretched in patience, who find things hard, and feel that God has abandoned them.

We pray for fathers and families whose children do not have clean water, including our Indigenous communities, or do not have enough food to eat, or access to medical supplies, especially in Gaza, the West Bank and Sudan where aid shipments have been thwarted or delivery of supplies been extremely dangerous.

We pray for all who are discouraged, lonely, suffering and ill, that the Spirit of God's love will strengthen them and restore them to health and wholeness.

We pray for all whose lives are disrupted by violence: for all who have lost homes and their community and become refugees: that God will protect them, guide them to food and shelter and help them develop new relationships. God, we envision a world where lives will never again be lost, where suffering is limited, and where aid and support get to the places and people who so desperately need it. We lift to you in particular Somalia, Sudan, Ukraine, Gaza, Iran, and Israel.

We lift up to you those affected by the deadly school shootings in the US and in Graz, Austria, where a former student opened fire in a high school, killing 11. We pray for the families and all who are impacted by the assassinations of two political leaders and their spouses in Minnesota yesterday. We dream of days when murder does not exist. We lift up those who died in the crash of a London-bound Air India flight shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad, India. Be with all who mourn the tragic loss of loved ones who perished in this air disaster. We pray for full recovery of the one survivor.

We lift up those who were in the mass killings near Gaza aid distribution centres where shooting attacks left at least 80 dead and hundreds wounded. We dream of days when we will no longer have to mourn unnecessary deaths. We lift to you those in the Los Angeles, California, protests over U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids as they escalate. We pray that the voices of those taking part in these and other protests across the US be heard. We dream of moments where conflicts will not be harbored and grow, and people from all places will be safe.

We pray for the resolution of the Israel-Iran conflict and Israel-Syria cross-border as hostilities intensify, with rockets having been launched from Israel, Iran, and Syria. We lift to you the geopolitical realities occurring in Poland, Mongolia, Ukraine, Gaza, and NATO. We dream of seasons where anger will be unheard of. We pray for a world where political change is made for the better and where everyone is treated with dignity and love. We lift up to you all leaders who are trying their best to make a positive difference and who are seeking peaceful solutions and seek wisdom. We lift up the leaders of the G7 meeting in the Kananaskis these next days and pray that unity may be sought regarding critical issues being discussed. We pray for peace: that God will bring new resolve and courage to leaders of nations working for peace and ending injustice.

God, we know our vision for the future may be big and often feel unreachable, but we know that you are present and accompany us in challenging times as well as good times. You, too, dream alongside us as we hope for a more beautiful and loving world, striving to be the leaders, doers, pray-ers, and children you have always called us to be. 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

Our Father ...