

## **Holy One, Holy Three, Holy Divine. Trinity Sunday May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

“Holy, holy, holy, God in three persons, blessed trinity” – these are the words from a well known hymn in Voices United. Blessed Trinity – what does that mean?

We hear the references made to the Trinity when we say our Creed;  
we hear it at a baptism;  
we hear it most Sundays at the benediction blessing.  
But, what is the Trinity?

Well, today it is Trinity Sunday, so it is a chance to unpack this important ancient doctrine that is central to our faith as Christians. And, let’s face it – there is a lot of confusion and mystery around it.

I mean – how can you put three ‘persons’ together and get one?  
Or, how can you divide one by three, and still have one?  
I am not a mathematician – I always focused on art through school and university – but even I know that such equations do not make logical sense.  
But the thing about the Trinity, is that it is not logical. It is holy mystery.

Now, that is not to say that we can just dismiss it – NO. It is far too central to our faith to do that. The Trinity helps us explain and understand:

- who God is,
- what God is like,
- how and where God is at work in the world,
- what God does for us,
- what God promises us
- (and) what God requires of us

We are not Christians because we believe in a doctrine – we are Christians because we believe in the Living God – and our Living God is declared through this doctrine to be the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. Yes – AND, not or.

Three in one, one in three.

Trying to understand this doctrine is not new. There have been many arguments throughout the centuries of theological scholarship debating the issue of The One True God. If the doctrine of the Trinity says that all three are God, then doesn’t that compromise our faith in the One True God? Are we in some way guilty worshipping three Gods?

There have been numerous attempts to explain what this Triune God might look like, and operate like. Perhaps some of these explanations might be familiar to you:

One explanation is that God is like a heavenly board of directors of a corporation where there are 3 equal partners, each with specific responsibilities. The Parent (Father or Mother) handles production, the Son handles the distribution, and the Spirit handles customer satisfaction. The terminology used in this explanation is often Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

But the problem with this approach is that it can distinguish the *work* of God into three task areas, carried out by different 'persons'. Instead, we need to remember that it is God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.

Another popular explanation is that God is like a committee or board where there is one big boss, and subordinates that go out and do what the boss orders. One God (the Father and Mother of us all), and two agents (Jesus and the Spirit) who are both totally invested in the work of God, but nonetheless subordinate.

This explanation protects the oneness of God, but how does it explain that Jesus was God incarnate, or that the Spirit is God dwelling within us?

Or, maybe you are a sports person and you might relate to the explanation of a hockey team sitting on the bench waiting their turn to get into the game, one after the other going out onto the ice to substitute each other. First comes the Father or Mother who deals with creation; then comes Jesus to do the work of salvation and the Gospels; and finally comes the Spirit at Pentecost to pick up where Jesus left off.

But this explanation also suggests that there are three separate Gods, each doing very separate things. It forgets that there is only ever One God in the game.

And finally, if you come from a theatre background, like me, then you might identify with the explanation that God is like an actor who 'changes costume' to play different roles. While this explanation recognizes that there is One God behind all the different roles, it still leaves the question that if God is playing a role – then who is the 'real God'?

And, it also negates the idea that God can play all the roles at all times – God can simultaneously be Powerful Creator of life, the loving friend and Companion with us, and the Giver of new life within and among us.

So, if there are pitfalls in all these explanations – how are we to understand the Triune God?

The simple explanation that the church adopts is 'One God in three persons', meaning 'One personal Living God, who lives and works in three different ways, all at the same time.'

And the important key here is the personal nature of the One God.

John of Damascus was a Greek theologian in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and he developed the concept of Perichoresis (perry-ko-ray'-sis) when discussing the Triune God. *Peri* means 'around' and *choresis* means 'dancing' – it's a lovely image of the Parent God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God all holding hands and dancing together in harmony. And while this image may still

conjure up the idea of three persons, it invites us to consider how all three join in one dance – in inter-personal harmony.

Gone are the solitary persons separated from each other;  
gone is the hierarchy of first, second and third importance;  
gone is the conflict of who is in charge.

There is instead, a mutual fellowship of community.

They are what they are, only in relationship to each other.

They are eternally united in mutual love and purpose, and the dance cannot continue unless all three are present at the same time. Remember, Jesus told his disciples that, *“the Father is ‘in’ me, just as I am ‘in’ the Father.”* (John10:38)

I know that still sounds like a numbers game of trying to put three into one – but the thing to remember is that the doctrine of the Trinity does not try to explain the Holy mystery of the Triune God – it encourages us to experience it in all its fullness.

What is most important is that rather than trying to define and explain the Triune God, we need to examine how the Trinity teaches us about who God is, and what God is doing in our lives, and in the world around us.

**(quietly play Holy , Holy, Holy)**

I invite you to consider how have you experienced God the Creator in the world around you?

How have you experienced the nurturing, caring presence of God the parent?

How have you been shown the immense measure of God’s love through the self-sacrificing actions of God the Son?

How has the actions and words of God the Son nudged you into actions of compassion and justice for others?

How have you felt the comfort of God the Spirit?

How has God the Spirit guided you in your faith journey?

How does your experience of God the Parent, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, invite and enable you to be a partner in God’s creative, reconciling, liberating, and renewing work in the world?

Holy one, holy three, holy divine.

As humans it is inevitable that we might think of one more than the other, but the works of the Parent, the Son, and the Spirit are indivisible – forever joined in Holy Mystery for us to daily experience. Amen.

**(stop music)**

Let us join together in saying excerpts from the United Church Song of Faith.

**God is Holy Mystery,  
beyond complete knowledge,  
above perfect description.  
Yet, in love,  
the one eternal God seeks relationship. ...  
With the Church through the ages,  
we speak of God as one and triune:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
We also speak of God as  
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer  
God, Christ, and Spirit  
Mother, Friend, and Comforter  
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,  
and in other ways that speak faithfully of  
the One on whom our hearts rely,  
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe.  
We witness to Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.**