

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

June 12, 2022 – TRINITY SUNDAY, YR. C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*A Divine Mystery—of Love*”\*

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 (Wisdom—Jesus Christ—was with, and in, God from the beginning)  
Canticle 13 (Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit)  
Romans 5:1-5 (Christ has justified us by faith, and God has given us His Holy Spirit)  
St. John 16:12-15 (Jesus the Son promises the gift of the Holy Spirit, bringing all of God the Father’s gifts)

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Lots of folks enjoy a good mystery. The creepy foreboding, the ‘red herrings,’ the cliffhangers, and finally discovering ‘who done it.’ Now, there’s even a TV channel—Ion Mystery—solely dedicated to mysteries and crime dramas. And Arthur Conan Doyle’s 19<sup>th</sup>-century fictional character Sherlock Holmes is still the most popular detective today. Some of you have shared with me the names of authors whose mystery novels you enjoy, because you know I like to read suspense-filled tales. I’m so thankful for Cornwall Manor’s full-scale library that’s actually part of the Lebanon County Library system. Over the past six years, I must have checked out *hundreds* of thrillers.

Trinity Sunday, presents us with a liturgical feast that honors a Christian doctrine filled with an even *greater* mystery. Even so, many preachers will dive into an overconfident attempt to explain the mystery of the Holy and Undivided Trinity in ten minutes or less. Such efforts are rarely successful, and usually end up articulating one of the 17 heresies about the Trinity, such as modalism, Arianism, tritheism, Docetism, or Adoptionism. It’s taken awhile for me to become aware that even I have been guilty of edging over into one or more heresy in past sermons!

Because the Holy Trinity is such a rich mystery, I finally realized it does not lend itself to bumper-sticker summaries. That said, if you want a manageable introduction to the Trinity, go to [Wikipedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity).<sup>1</sup> There, you can find both a history of the doctrine’s development and an article on the Trinitarian heresies.

Or, if you’d prefer a humorous approach, click over to YouTube, where Lutheran Satire has produced a three-minute video, “St. Patrick’s Bad Trinity Analogies”<sup>2</sup> which hilariously demonstrates the pitfalls of heretical views. Then it quickly takes you right to the core of the mystery: That one God—in three, co-equal, co-eternal, and consubstantial Persons—*cannot be understood* by human reason, but can only *grasped by faith, and confessed in the Creeds*. Moreover, when we try to shrink this profound mystery down to a size we can rationally comprehend, we miss an opportunity to open ourselves up to *experiencing* this Divine mystery in all its power.

Rather than trying to reduce a holy mystery to a shorthand explanation—or a bad analogy such as a three-leafed clover—it might be better to ask, what does the Trinity have to do with us today? How does One God in Three Persons connect to our day-to-day lives? And how can we be drawn more deeply into this unfathomable mystery for our own spiritual blessing?

Last Sunday, the Day of Pentecost, we focused on the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This theme continues today in our reading from St. John’s Gospel. Here, Jesus is speaking to His disciples—His close friends—just prior to His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascent into Heaven.

Jesus began Chapter 16 (v. 1, RSV) by telling them: “I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away.” He knows that He will be leaving them, and does not want them to either drift from their faith, feel orphaned, or be without help. Jesus reassures them—and He does the same for us today—that, although they are about to face seemingly insurmountable challenges, He will be with them *always*, in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

We humans are programmed to look for answers with our minds. We are trained to rationally define what we can experience with our five senses, not to seek a deeper reality beyond our comprehension. We are trained to be leaders, not followers. But God wants to set us free from this way of looking at the Divine.

Ever since His ascension into Heaven, Jesus has returned to His people in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Receiving the Lord as He comes to us in this invisible, non-material, way should set us free from the limitations of rationalism and the tyranny of the quantifiable. For Christ wants to release us from the pressure of acting as though we have it all figured out.

Imagine a different way of approaching the challenges of our lives: Picture yourself waiting quietly in the presence of the Trinity, listening for God the Father's voice; feeling the peace that Jesus the Son came to bring us; and asking for the accurate guidance of the Holy Spirit, which Christ promises us today in John 16:13. What if we did this, instead of, whenever we face any difficulty, confronting God and informing Him of how we want it to turn out?

We shouldn't have to work hard to imagine connecting with the Holy Trinity, because participating in the life of the Trinity is our reality as believers! In the Trinity, we see a community of everlasting *love*—and, as Jesus promised, a God who is with us always, showing us that perfect love in all His ways.

Some years ago, a priest from this country was traveling to an impoverished part of the world on a mission trip. There, the priest struck up a conversation with the local Anglican bishop. It turns out the bishop had visited the U.S. several times and knew The Episcopal Church fairly well. The priest asked the bishop about his perception of The Episcopal Church compared with the local Anglican Church. With great gentleness, the bishop replied:

“I love your Church. The problem is that you have too much. When you have too much, it is easy to forget that you are dependent on God. Here, we do not have enough of many things. Every day, we are reminded that we are utterly dependent on God.”<sup>3</sup>

The bishop's point was: Comfort breeds complacency. Material abundance and worldly success make us think we have our important needs already met. We start thinking of God as someone on whom we call only when we want something, sort of like a divine 8-Ball or a supernatural rabbit's foot.

We tend to forget that God has already given us everything we need, and that, like it or not, we are *always* dependent on God, whether or not we want to perceive that we are. *And* ... we forget how profoundly we are *loved by* God.

In the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, we find everything there is to know about God's love. We see a Person who entered our world in the humblest, most mundane way possible, so that He might become one with ordinary human beings—us! We see a Person who loved everyone, yet, at the same time, challenged each individual to be transformed and made new. That's an important point: Jesus never said to anyone He encountered, “You're perfect just the way you are.” Rather, He invited *every person* to be changed by the power of God's forgiving love.

In Jesus Christ, we see that God was willing to endure the pain and suffering of our humanity in order that we might know the wide embrace of God's love for all people. And in Jesus Christ, we see the triumph of God's love over death itself.

Through the Resurrection, God has made it possible for us to be fearless. Because Christ is risen, we no longer need to be afraid of *anything*—not even death. But the mystery of the Holy Trinity pushes us to look even further. On Pentecost, and today, as we think about the Holy Spirit, we see yet another dimension of God's love for us.

Through the Third Person of the Trinity, God has promised to be with us always and to guide us into all truth. The Holy Spirit's guidance and love are inseparable from the love of God the Father and from the love of God the Son.

Because the Trinity demonstrates the reality that God's very being is about relationship and love, the Holy Trinity is itself the manifestation of God's abiding promise to be with us at every turn, through every struggle we face. He will never leave us or forsake us—and *that* is good news!

As compared to the negativity and chaos of the world around us, in the Holy Trinity we see a God who is eternally steadfast, and on Whom we can lean when the sands of life are shifting underfoot, or the tidal waves of pain or loss threaten to drag us under.

Too often, we limit our perceptions of reality to what fits into our own finite understanding. But when we believe in, and worship, the Holy Trinity, we are led deeper into the mystery of a loving God whose guidance, peace, and protection we desperately need.

So today, let us not try to explain that which is unfathomable. Rather, let us join heartily in songs of praise to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And let us give thanks that this Triune God loves us more than we can ever grasp.

Let us give thanks for God the Father's everlasting presence in our lives through His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, both in this age and in the age to come. Let us savor with joy a God who offers us the best mystery of all—a love so deep, so wide, so broad, and so eternal, it is beyond anything we can ask or imagine. *Amen.*

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\* Adapt. N. George-Hacker, "The Best Mystery—Ever!" St. John's Episcopal Church, Compass PA, 16 June 2019, and St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Cobleskill NY, 11 June 2017. Used with permission.

<sup>1</sup> "Trinity," [Wikipedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity), 1 June 2022 <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity>> 7 June 2022.

<sup>2</sup> "St. Patrick's Bad Trinity Analogies," [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXoKuX0xmog) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXoKuX0xmog>>

<sup>3</sup> Adapt. Scott Gunn, "Sermon for Trinity Sunday, Year C," 2016, [The Episcopal Church.org](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/Sermon-English-Trinity-Sunday-C-2016.pdf) <<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/Sermon-English-Trinity-Sunday-C-2016.pdf>> 7 June 2020. Used with permission.