

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

May 30, 2021 – TRINITY SUNDAY YR. B / MEMORIAL DAY

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*The Greatest Love Triangle of All*”

Isaiah 6:1-8 (God commissions the prophet Isaiah)
Canticle 13 (In praise of the Holy Trinity)
Romans 8:12-17 (God's Spirit within us shows us that we are children of God)
St. John 3:1-17 (Jesus teaches Nicodemus about new life through Baptism and the Holy Spirit)

Today is “Trinity Sunday,” the day Christians around the world take time to consider one of the greatest doctrines of our faith: the magnificence and mystery of a God who is three-in-one — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹ Every Sunday, when we profess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed, we affirm our belief in the God who took on human form, came and lived among us, suffered the same trials we suffer, and experienced the same feelings we do.²

Søren Kierkegaard, the great 19th-century Danish theologian, tells the story of a prince who wanted to find a maiden suitable to be his queen. One day, while running an errand for his father in the local village, he passed through a poor neighborhood. As he glanced out the windows of the carriage, his eyes fell upon a beautiful peasant girl. During the ensuing days, the prince often passed by the young lady and soon fell in love. But he had a problem. How would he seek her hand?

He could order her to marry him. But even a prince wants his bride to marry him freely and voluntarily, not through coercion. He could put on his most splendid uniform and drive up to her front door in a carriage drawn by six horses. But if he did this, he would never be certain the maiden loved him or was simply overwhelmed by such splendor. The prince came up with another solution. He would give up his kingly robe. He moved into the village, entering not with a crown but in the garb of a peasant. He lived among the people, shared their interests and concerns, and spoke their language. In time, the maiden grew to love him for who he was, *and* because he had first loved her.

This simple, childlike tale, written by one of the most brilliant minds ever, explains what we Christians mean by the Incarnation. God came and lived among us! God coming to live among us in the Person of His Son Jesus demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is with us, that He is on our side, and that He loves us. Moreover, in Jesus, God gave us a first-hand view of who God is. When people ask what God is like, we Christians point to the person of Jesus Christ. God the Father is Himself incomprehensible, as well as invisible. But in Jesus of Nazareth, we get a tangible glimpse of both God's character and His glory. In the person of Jesus, we find that God, who created the heavens and the earth, is willing to go all the way for us, even to die on a cross, so that every single person might be redeemed from death and hell. Jesus crucified for us, *that's* what God is like.³

If you're familiar with church history, you may know that the Trinity has been one of the thorniest subjects in the history of Christianity. The articulation of how we understand a God who is three persons in one deity was a complex theological construct thrashed out by the doctors of the church in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Still, the subject comes up for argument every few decades. And even though we often sing the Doxology, praising “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” the triune nature of the Godhead doesn't figure in many Christians' daily expressions of their faith.

But it should. Because knowing and experiencing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit helps us bring to our world the kind of faith, hope, and love for which millions are desperately hungering. That's because the Holy Trinity is the greatest love triangle in the universe!

A few years ago Reba McEntire brought back a song Jo Stafford and Ella Fitzgerald independently made famous in 1947, called “A Sunday Kind of Love.” This was also the song that made Christine Aguilera famous as a little girl singing on television in 1988.

The song speaks to every generation because all generations are crying out for a different kind of love than the one they’re finding in our culture:⁴ not a shallow Monday love; an unfaithful Tuesday love; a short-lived Wednesday love; a jealous Thursday love; an occasional Friday love; or a vengeful Saturday love; but a *Sunday* kind of love. As the song says, “love for all my life to have and to hold,” and “a lover who will show me the way.”

The love that lasts for a-lifetime-and-beyond is God the Father’s, as revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ. And the Lover who will show us the way is the Holy Spirit. It is He, Jesus promised, who “will guide us into all truth” (John 16:13).

In the Church, we also teach that the persons of the Trinity are Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. God created the world, Jesus redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit sustains both the world and us. We witness these glorious purposes of God as they unfold in our own circumstances. We perceive God’s hand in the beauty and majesty of nature. We know what God is like, as we become better acquainted with the character and teaching of Jesus.⁵ And we are drawn closer to God through our experiences of the Holy Spirit, as He deepens our faith, provides us with right discernment, helps us to understand the Scriptures, and comforts us in our times of need. In all of this, we perceive and experience the profound love of God, which every person so greatly needs.

God did not have to be a Trinity, for God Himself is all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful, ,and eternal. So why is our God three-in-one? Because two are a pair, but three form a *community*. So, God Himself is a community of love and care, of support and compassion, of empathy and understanding. In His triune nature, God models for us how we are to live with one another here on earth—in mutually loving community, whether in our families, workplaces, schoolrooms, neighborhoods, or parish.

Sixteen centuries ago, St. Augustine observed, “Because the image of the Trinity was made in man ... in this way man should be the image of the one true God.”⁶ And Kallistos Ware, a Greek Orthodox bishop, writes about the Holy Trinity: “‘United, yet not confused, distinct yet not divided’: such are the divine persons, and such also, although on a different level, are the human persons-in-relationship who are formed in God’s image. God is self-giving, solidarity, reciprocity, response ... God is shared love, not self-love: such also is the human person.”⁷

Made in God’s image, we are hard-wired for relationships of loving community, for sharing and giving. We may never fully understand the doctrine or theology of the Trinity, but we do understand love. And those of us who are in a relationship with Jesus Christ know it is through Him that God’s redeeming, merciful love is poured into our lives. And, we have experienced that love filling us through the power of God’s Holy Spirit, enabling us to love others—even those whom we thought were unlovable.

With regard to love, Garrison Keillor, a modern American prophet you may remember from the radio show “A Prairie Home Companion,” has said: “We should not think that we have figured this out, because [love] is not a problem, it is a mystery and always will be.”

So maybe, if we can’t figure out the Trinity in these few minutes (and, given that the Church in over two thousand years hasn’t been able to, either) it’s a fairly safe bet we won’t have the last word on it today. However, we can at least point to what the doctrine of the Trinity tells us about God, and how we experience God.⁸ The Bible says “God is love” (1 John 4:16b) and now we know that the Holy Trinity is the world’s greatest Love Triangle.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14). Amen.

¹ Adapt, Leonard Sweet, “A Sunday Kind of Love,” www.Sermons.com (sermons@clergy.net> 25 May 2010. Used with permission.

² Adapt, Brett Blair, “The Trinity,” ChristianGlobeNetwork.com (illustrations@CLERGY.NET> 21 May 2002. Used with permission.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Adapt, Sweet, *op. cit.*

⁵ Adapt, “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,” Synthesis_Your_C.com, 30 May 2010, p. 1. Used with permission.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Adapt, James C. Leach, “Naming God,” Pulpit Digest (January / February 1991), p. 55.