

## **One in Community – Trinity Sunday – May 31, 2015**

**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

I begin my message this morning with a quote from John Wesley, "Bring me a worm that can comprehend a human being, and then I will show you a human being that can comprehend the Triune God." Today is Trinity Sunday, the day on the church calendar on which we examine one of the most inexplicable doctrines of the Christian Church – the doctrine of the Trinity.

What exactly is the issue? Well, like our Jewish and Muslim friends, we believe in a monotheistic God. That is, we believe in one God. Yet unlike them, we also believe that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three distinct persons. But still we maintain a belief in one God. Yeah, I know, mathematically it doesn't seem to add up. No wonder Jews and Muslims tend to reject our adamant assertion that we believe in one God just like them. We believe in the uniqueness of each person of the Trinity but still affirm that together Father, Son and Holy Spirit equal just one God. We may not be able to understand how that works, but we accept it nonetheless.

Here's a little history for you. Back in the fourth century, a group of church leaders got together to hammer out a little bit of doctrine. There had been a huge debate going on in Christian theological circles about the nature of God, especially in the person of Jesus Christ. Questions came up about Jesus. Was he fully human? Was he fully divine? What was his relationship to God? Furthermore, how did the Holy Spirit fit in to the whole equation? What do the three persons of the trinity have in common, and what distinguishes them from one another? The early disciples didn't really give much thought to these questions. Their task was to carry out Christ's mission and build the church. But once the church was established, these questions began to arise. After much belaboring of the issue, as only a church committee can do, the Nicene Creed was born.

It was this argument over the doctrine of the Trinity that caused the split between the Western Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. But it is the Orthodox Church that has given us perhaps the best visualization of how to understand the Trinity. The oneness of God is an eternal unified relationship between the persons of the Trinity – a oneness of community. It is a relationship that has no beginning or end, and none of the persons cannot exist outside of relationship.

It may still be impossible for us to understand this unique relationship, but if you can take away one bit of information, know this - the persons of the Trinity have not existed and cannot exist outside of this community. This is a mutual existence that has no beginning and no ending. Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always been and will always be one in

community. It is a community of equals who exist in mutual love for one another. They are not independent of one another, they are eternally interdependent.

Now if that boggles your mind too much, it's okay. Sometimes when we do try to figure out the mystery, the explanation seems even more confusing. Sometimes it may make more sense to us on Trinity Sunday to look at not only who God is, but also what God does. Traditionally this is understood as identifying the persons of the trinity by their specific roles, and by this I mean, understanding God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

First we understand God as the Creator. The very first words of the Bible tell us that God created everything that exists. Nothing exists that does not have its beginnings in God, and that includes human beings. As creatures we are subject to the one who created us. We are dependent on God to fulfill our needs and provide for us. We have been given a beautiful world in which to live and we have been commissioned to be the stewards of that world. We as creatures exist only because God chose to create us.

Yet we are different from the other parts of God's Creation. Human beings were created in the image of God. This is important for us because it implies a direct relationship to God, and we carry this possibility for relationship within us. Being created in the image of God not only impacts our relationship to God, but also our relationship to one another. If in fact every human being is created in God's image, that tells us a lot about how we are supposed to relate to one another.

So if we understand God's very being as oneness in community, let's dig a little deeper. The oneness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit occurs because of the inherent and eternal relationship between the persons of the Trinity – an ongoing, never-ending community. If we humans then were created in God's image, then that leads me to believe that community is rather important. This concept of relationship is crucial to our humanity.

Of course we all know through personal experience that the concept of relationship is marred by the existence of sin. We sin against God, and we sin against one another. Sin keeps us from having positive relationships. Sin is the barrier that exists between us and God and between us and our fellow humans. Sin is a real problem. But fortunately for us, God is not only the Creator, God is also the Redeemer.

It is this role of God as Redeemer that leads us most directly to the work of God through Jesus Christ. Christ is our savior. It is through his intervention that the barrier that keeps us from having relationship to God and to one another was defeated. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's grace was poured out upon all humanity and our sins were and are forgiven. We could never hope to achieve this on our own. Only God could bring us back into relationship. Only God could restore the possibility of community. And why

would God do this? Not because we deserve it, because we don't. God did this because God loves us. The persons of the Trinity commune with one another in a mutual love. Love is an integral part of who God is, and that love extends to us humans, those beings lovingly created in God's image.

God is our redeemer. Left to our own devices, we have a tendency to stray, and so God saves us from ourselves.

And finally, in addition to Creator and Redeemer, we have the third role of God as that of Sustainer. This is the role most closely associated with the Holy Spirit. God sustains us. What does that mean? The Holy Spirit is often seen as the part of God that is at work within the world. The Spirit of God ignited the early Christians and on Pentecost the church was born. The actions of the Spirit promote community and nurture our growth in the life faith. The Spirit empowers us to love to love one another. The Spirit of God provides us with everything we need in order to follow the call of God in our lives.

So let's take stock of what we have. Father, Son and Holy Spirit – or Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer – exist only in community with one another. The oneness of God, this doctrine of Trinity, finds its expression within a community of mutual love. Beyond this community, the persons of the Trinity do not exist. If then we see this as the basic understanding of who God is, we get a glimpse of the importance of relationship. I said earlier that the key point of being created in the image of God is this possibility of relationship. We were in fact created for relationship. It is a fundamental part of who we are.

The doctrine of the trinity tells us much about God, and in turn, much about ourselves. If we understand God to exist only within this community of mutual love, relying on and being interdependent with each person of the trinity, and we understand ourselves as having been created in God's image, then we too are designed to live in community. As we learn more about God's inner self – Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we can learn more about ourselves. We were created to live in community with one another, we were redeemed in order that that community could exist without barriers, and we are sustained by God to live in ongoing mutual love with one another and with God.