The First Sunday after Pentecost

Trinity Sunday – Year C

June 15, 2025

Trinity, St. Louis

The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

*Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31*

*Psalm 8*

*Romans 5:1-5*

*John 16:12-15*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.[[1]](#footnote-1) Amen.

If you are used to saying Morning or Evening Prayer, you might think, “Oh, golly, have we finished already? Did I miss it?” Don’t worry. You haven’t.

In today’s reading from John’s gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, she will guide you into all the truth.”

*I still have many things to say …, but you cannot bear them now*. Let’s pause for a moment and consider the patient kindness enfolded by those words. Jesus does not say, “I’m out of here, so listen up.” Instead, he promises them the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, of ongoing understanding. The Spirit who would slowly guide the disciples — and that means us, too — into a fuller knowledge of everything that Jesus left unsaid.

*The Spirit will guide you into all truth*. We are not promised that the Spirit will lead us to all truth, as if truth with a capital-T was a destination. Instead, Jesus promises a *paraklētos* (παράκλητος) who will, quite literally, come up alongside us, leading us into more and more truth.

When we think about this mystery that we name as Trinity, Jesus’ promise reminds us that we do not have to understand everything right now. We do not have to find the perfect words to describe the fullness of God. We cannot find the perfect words! Our linguistic arms are simply too short. Our words usually serve to define and confine rather than evoke and open up.

Years ago, when my being a priest was still only a glimmer in other people’s eyes, I was assigned the task of preaching on Trinity Sunday. In my newly minted PhD ignorance I thought, “I’ve got this. I’ve heard decades of sermons about the Trinity. I know what not to say.”

It was only much later that I found out that this assignment was a sort of entrance exam for my sponsoring rector. In addition, I rather suspect he wanted someone else to preach that day, but that’s for him to say. After all, many of us are used to thinking that today is about a doctrine. And the technical lingo of doctrinal debate is pretty much the ultimate insider baseball…which can get us all tied up in knots.

In 1939, in a little book called *Strong Meat*,[[2]](#footnote-2) Dorothy L. Sayers, crime writer (of Lord Peter Wimsey fame), playwright, poet, and resolute woman in an era largely hostile to feminism, parodied what an enquirer about the doctrine of the Trinity might learn in the worst theological circumstances:[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Q.* What does the Church think of God the Father?

*A.* He is rather like a Dictator, only larger and more arbitrary.

*Q.* What does the Church think of God the Son?

*A.* He is in some way to be identified with Jesus of Nazareth. He has a good deal of influence with God, and if you want anything done, it is best to apply to Him.

*Q.* What does the Church think of God the Holy Ghost?

*A.* I don’t know exactly. He was never seen or heard of till Whit-Sunday. There is a sin against Him which damns you for ever, but nobody knows what it is.

*Q.* What [then] is the doctrine of the Trinity?

*A.* “The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the whole thing incomprehensible.” Something put in by theologians to make it more difficult — nothing to do with daily life or ethics.

These responses are humorous, but inadequate, if not misleading. No wonder some people dismiss the Trinity as “two boys and a bird.” What, then, are we to do?

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Let’s begin with the texts. It is true that the words “Trinity,” or “Three-in-One,” or “One-in-Three” are not found in the Bible. But in the decades before the New Testament was assembled, St. Paul experimented with new language in an attempt to express what God was up to. After all, what drove the debates about the Trinity in the young church was the quest for a way to speak about the experience of the resurrected Jesus; of what it meant to live into the good news of God in Christ.

Today, for example, he writes to the Romans about God’s love having been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. For Paul, it is precisely this outpouring of divine love in the Spirit which touches our deepest core and draws us by way of God into God, into that intimate space of love where the Spirit moves eternally between Father and Son and yet also constantly deflects that love outward to the world.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In his 1963 book *Honest to God*, English bishop John A. T. Robinson writes, “One can say that for the Christian the deepest awareness of ultimate reality … can only be described *at one and the same time* in terms of the love of God *and* of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *and* of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”

What I’m trying to evoke (but not describe) is a sense of space within God. A boundless, constantly active, yet intimate space into which we are invited by the Holy Spirit who is, as Augustine said, ecstatically “inflaming” us with “love for God and neighbour.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

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Perhaps a useful analogy would be God in 3-D.[[6]](#footnote-6) One dimension gives us lines (with distance), two dimensions gives us triangles, or circles, or squares (with area), and three dimensions gives us pyramids, or spheres, or cubes (with volume). Language about the Trinity attempts to evoke a sense of God in three dimensions – we often call these grace, love, and fellowship. In the heart of this space, life in God is more accurately called life within God…for the sake of the world.

Well, so what? What might this particular metaphor of life within God have to do with anything? I want to tell you a story about a parade which led me to think more deeply about this idea of God in 3-D, and the active, intimate space within the Trinity. (Side note, this is not a story about the parade that took place in Washington, DC yesterday. I’m just saying…)

A couple of years ago, I marched in the Pride Parade in Indianapolis. I’ve been to a lot of Pride Parades in my day, but that year was different in a couple of ways. For reasons of geography and timing, I’d never been to a parade as a priest. But, more importantly, I’d never been IN a Pride Parade. It may surprise you to know that I’m an introvert, and large crowds are often a difficult thing for me.

But I was trying to take seriously the call to witness to the extravagant love of God to a pretty messed up world. So, I signed up, and found myself that morning waiting in the lineup area. It gave me the chance to catch up with some friends and to meet new folks. The Bishop of Indianapolis was there as our chief cheerleader. All cool things, and about what I expected.

What I didn’t expect was what happened when we stepped out onto the parade route itself. The welcome we received was powerful, almost overwhelming. There were walls of sound as people cheered us – God people. Christians. Episcopalians. My face hurt for days from all the smiling. I lost count of the number of high-5s people in the crowd offered. (OK, that may have been against the rules, but no one wrote me up.)

Within that parade, within the dimensionality between the barricades, I saw a constant movement of people, back and forth, to and fro. People darting out from the crowd to hug people they knew. We were walking in joy. Then, at some point, I realized that we were not walking for us. We were walking for them. For all those people whose faces were bright with smiles or shiny with tears… all because they heard someone say, “God loves **you**. No exceptions.”

Grace…love…fellowship.

My experience of a 3-D God on that Saturday in Indy is as suitable a metaphor for the Holy Trinity as any I have ever heard. It has helped lead me more deeply into a sense of the Triune God. A vibrant sense of the Trinity matters because you and I are created in the image of a God who is, by nature, diverse and equitable and inclusive.

The Trinity matters when we hear mean-spirited bigots use “DEI” as a code for White Christian Nationalism, misogyny, and racial purity. The Trinity matters when people weaponize a God who more closely resembles what they see in the mirror, rather than worshiping the mysterious, fluid, diverse, communal, hospitable, and loving God whose dream it is to guide us into the whole truth of who God is and who we are. The Trinity matters, because the mystery of the Trinity has the power to transform our hearts, to draw us into an ever-changing and diverse community formed in hospitable love for the other.

Grace…love…fellowship.

When it seems like we’re always swimming upstream, it’s important to remember that we don’t have to do all the work – but we do have to show up, and ask the Holy Spirit to pull up alongside us. How do we know when it’s the Holy Spirit on the phone? As Frederick Buechner writes, “Listen to your life. Listen to what happens to you because it is through what happens to you that God speaks. It’s in language that’s not always easy to decipher, but it’s there powerfully, memorably, unforgettably.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The Trinity is about daily life, not irrelevant theories. Having received the gift of God’s love, freely given, you can come to delight in life within God, and then give freely of your life to others, knowing that your life is upheld by the One who *is* Life, and who gives Life to the full. Spread the word!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

1. BCP, 102. Based on 2 Corinthians 13:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. London: Hodder & Stoughton: June 1939. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thanks to the Rev. Dr. Sara Coakley for introducing me to this bit of the wit of Dorothy L. Sayers: https://livingchurch.org/2022/03/26/the-way-into-the-trinity/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Coakley, op. cit., paraphrased. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Augustine, *de trin* XV, ch. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Thanks to Michael Fitzpatrick, *God in 3-D*, https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3397 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Frederick Buechner, *Now and Then: A Memoir of Vocation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)