

## WE BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY

John 17:20-26

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“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Most of us have had those words spoken to us as water was sprinkled on our heads or our bodies were plunged into some pool. If water is a sign of God’s grace, then the Trinity is a mystery of God’s nature.

This is Trinity Sunday. Sunday after Sunday we sing about the Trinity, pray to the Trinity, and hear great thanksgivings expressed to the Trinity, but who of us understands this uniquely Christian expression of faith? I’m sure in the next few minutes I can make all that perfectly clear.

### **WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD**

Our Jewish friends rise in the morning and say “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” We Christians say “Amen.”

Our Muslim friends face Mecca five times a day and say “God is one, Allah is his name.” Understanding Allah to be the Arabic word for God, we Christians say “Okay.”

Like Jews and Muslims, we Christians practice a monotheistic religion.

Christians believe in one God. Let not our belief in the Trinity diminish our understanding of the Unity which exists in the one living and true God. God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit is one. You can’t have one without the other.

When things are in chaos, we need someone to take charge. When life is falling apart, we need a creator to put things back together. So we call upon God the Father Almighty to demonstrate his power. But we do not call upon God the Father separate from the Son or in lieu of the Holy Spirit — for the three are one.

When we mess up, miss the mark of our high calling, trespass on another’s personhood, or transgress against the laws of God, we need a Savior. We find a friend in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. But the mercy seat of Jesus is no different from the mercy seat of Jehovah made present by the power of the Spirit — for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One.

Sometimes these dry hearts of ours become thirsty for the fresh water of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes you just want to be stimulated with joy, astounded by love, excited by life. So we talk about being filled by the Holy Spirit, maybe even shouting, shaking, or speaking in tongues. But let us not be fooled. The Holy Spirit does nothing on his own. As Jesus said, the Holy Spirit brings glory to me even as I am one with the Father. God is One.

The central sin in the Bible is not sex, not lying, not cheating, not even murder. The central sin in the Bible is idolatry. Some of you would fight to post the Ten Commandments in public places. Can you cite the first one? What is it? “You shall have no other gods before me” is number one on the list.

Paul Tillich said in the 1960’s our god is our ultimate concern. Whatever gains our ultimate attention becomes our god. We have problems with idolatry in the 21st century too.

Like Martha in the Bible, we are troubled and concerned over many things. We are concerned about work, family, marriage, health, life. Every concern is tyrannical. It wants to own our whole heart, our whole mind. It wants our infinite attention, our unconditional devotion. I saw a bumper sticker stating “Soccer Rules.” In Brentwood, Tennessee, they are right. In many families that is true. We develop all kinds of gods.

Maybe it’s time to pledge our allegiance to the one, true, living, everlasting, God and set our feet to walking in God’s ways. We believe in one God.

**WE BELIEVE THIS ONE GOD IS EXPRESSED IN THREE PERSONS** which makes Christianity a unique religion in all the world. Or, as the hymn states it, “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”

While the word Trinity is not found in the Bible, the concepts of the Trinity exist in the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

The Holy Trinity is a mystery. No preacher has fully explained it. But so is eternity, or electricity, or the love of a man for a woman. Behold, life is a mystery. Personally I would rather believe in a God that I can’t understand, than shrink God to the size of my finite brain. So let’s abandon our need to create God in our image.

Sure, the Trinity is a mystery because God is bigger than I can think, thank God. Every attempt to explain the Trinity is inadequate. I’ve tried all of them and I’ve failed every time.

The Trinity is like a three leaf clover—three leaves on one stem; a great idea of St. Patrick’s Day but hardly a full description of the Holy.

The Trinity is like water which can be liquid, steam, or ice, but always H<sub>2</sub>O. That is great science, but poor theology.

Or the worst one I ever tried, was using a hard boiled egg that I pretended to crack over a poor kid’s head during the children’s sermon. I profoundly announced that just as an egg has three parts, so does God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — which caused one little girl to respond “Yuk.”

What if there is Community in the Unity of God? What if by the Trinity we mean not three distinct individuals or centers of consciousness, not three modes

of operating like I might try to be a father, a son, and a pastoral counselor. What if by three persons we mean a vital, spiritual connection (hypostaseis), the Greek word for person, signifying relationship, community, interaction? What if the very nature of God is relational? What if it is not even good for God to exist alone? So God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unified into one by the bonds of love.

If that's true, then the image of God in us longs for community. We are not made to be rugged individuals. We are not made to do it all ourselves. We are not made to be self-sufficient. It means that it is not good for humans to be alone. We need one another. We are made to belong.

The world has figured that out. Companies push for product loyalty. Sports fans are fanatics about belonging. Do you bleed blue or wear orange or root for the black and gold? Does our love of sports reveal our lack of faith?

I wonder if our fanaticism about sports is not a revelation of the failure of the church. What if we were put on earth as the body of Christ to create community? When will we rediscover the "fellowship of kindred minds" that made the early church a transformational community void of all political power?

What does it mean for you and me? It means that we were made for community and will never be happy until we find the bonds of love that connect us one to another and to God Almighty.

If, in fact, the Trinity is an expression of a relationship that is in the essence of God himself, and God-head himself is community, what would that mean to the Church? What could a renewal of the Trinity do for the Church? What if the Church reinvented itself — not as an ecclesiastical powerhouse with popes, bishops, and pastors in charge, and not as an entrepreneurial ego trip of some narcissistic, charismatic preacher who wants to be accountable to no one — and became a community? What difference would it make?

What if the church became a genuine community of faith that reflected the community of God as expressed in the Holy Trinity? What if there was power in the church to really transform chaos into creation? What if our sins really were confessed and forgiven? What if the Holy Spirit really did bind us together in a kind of radical love that the world had never seen before?

O, deep in my heart,  
Sometimes I catch the vision  
Of what it might really be like  
To embrace the Holy Trinity!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.