

**Three For One: Trinity Sunday**  
**Rev. David A. Douthett**  
**Catoctin Presbyterian Church, Waterford, VA**  
**June 16, 2019**

**Things to tell you you are not ready to hear**

Opening

Lucy Lind Hogan at Working Preacher:

“I suspect that most in your congregation would not appreciate a sermon that began like this: “There are things that are essential to our faith, but I can’t speak about them because you would **not** be able to understand. They are far too complicated and way over your head.””

Trinity Sunday, as Molly pointed out to me, is the only day on the church calendar focusing on a doctrine of the church rather than an event in Jesus’ life and ministry.

The Trinity! Holy smokes. The only thing I get more questions about from folks is non-Presbyterians asking about predestination.

**God, Jesus, Spirit in John: abiding presence**

Exegesis

How can three be one and one be three?

In some sense, when the church was trying to figure it out, it ruled out all the other possibilities of how God the Father of Jesus, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit could be in relationship to each other, and trinity is what was left.

It’s like quantum mechanics: anyone who tells you they understand it is lying or misinformed.

The scriptures never use the word and do not describe a doctrine. But they do describe the relationships of Jesus to the God he called “Father” and to the Holy Spirit. These are especially on display in John’s gospel.

In our passage today, Jesus is still trying to get through to the rather dense disciples at the last supper. Perhaps realizing that he has run out of time, he tells them there is more they need to know, but it will have to wait.

He tells about the coming Holy Spirit, whose job will be essentially to extend Jesus' own teaching ministry and direction for the disciples, and that:

- the Spirit's word will be the same as Jesus' word,
- the Spirit's plan the same as Jesus' plan,
- the Spirit's power the same as Jesus' power,
- which are the same as the Father's word, plan, and power.

Take a look at the diagram on the cover of the bulletin: Three equal and distinct elements entwined and bound together as a single figure. That's what Jesus was describing.

He is telling them that there is absolute continuity in what God is doing from before Jesus, through Jesus, and after Jesus, so if they trust God, they can trust Jesus and the Spirit. If they trust Jesus, they can trust God and the Spirit.

### **Which is really the hurricane? Which is really the river?**

MI: Nature Smart

God, then, is redefined for Christians as being a mysteriously complex, interrelated union of persons bound together in their existence, their substance, their action, and their love for each other.

Here are a couple metaphors.

- Consider a hurricane: Of the water, wind, and heat, which is actually the storm?
  - If there's no water, it's just hot air.
  - If there's no wind, it's just a bit of low cloud.
  - If there's no heat, it's just a rainstorm.
- Consider a river: Of the water, bed, and motion, which is actually the river?
  - If there's no water, it's just a just gully.
  - If there's no bed, it's a flood.
  - If there's no motion, it's just a pool.

What's lacking in these examples is the element of love.... That cannot be missing from God, because God is love.

### **That moment of adoring connection**

MI: People Smart

Those moments of deep, intense connection with someone beloved to you:

- parent,
- lover,
- child,
- fur-child.

The whole world seems to shrink down in those moment so that it only contains the two of you.

But what if it were three, all co-equal in standing and all equally drenched in joyful, peaceful love?

This is something like what we understand to be happening within Godself.

- Three persons,
- all unique,
- all entirely equal,
- bound in absolute selfless love.

We are invited to participate in this complex love!

Through the love of God, the grace of Christ Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be part of the union of God.

This is just what Jesus prayed in the next chapter: “that they may all be one. As You, Father, are in me and I am in You, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

As Paul writes in Romans, we are children of God and co-heirs with Christ.

What a glorious, mysterious love we have with God!

### **Broken souls who make bad choices, not experiencing the connection**

Lament

But what happens when a soul has no experience of this mystery? What will become of someone who doesn't know God and sees no evidence of loving, gracious union among humans?

We know very well what happens.

Such souls get crushed, warped, misshapen, isolated, broken.

Those who live under the power of:

- oppressive force or abuse on their backs
- hatred or prejudice reducing their humanity
- no opportunities for meaningful work or fair pay
- violence and chaos in home or community
- fear of never having enough
- widespread indifference to their suffering
- no person or church or institution to support them, to have mercy on them, to remember their humanity for them

Such souls begin to make what are at first awful choices, perhaps even impossible choices;  
and then may move on to just making bad choices routinely;  
and then perhaps they begin to make the same choices as those oppressive, violent, or indifferent forces that warped them in the first place.

It is not inevitable, but it is needlessly common.

### **Three most important sentences**

MI: Self Smart

At *Lectionary Lab*, Delmer Chilton mentions a Barna Research study that identifies the three most important statements we want to hear from another person:

- “I love you,”
- “I forgive you,” and
- “Dinner is ready, let’s eat.”

Surely, these are central statements in the life of any Christian, for they are words that God says to us, and then we say them to one another in church.

What healing power these simple sentences have! What a sense of communion for the soul who hears them! What transformation might happen in the lives of those battered and bent souls to hear them genuinely from God and God’s people!

### **God intends to expand the Godhead to include all the humans**

Theology

God the Father is in Jesus Christ and Christ in the Father in perfect unity. They finish each other’s sandwiches. The Holy Spirit is the expression of that union into the world, also perfectly one with the Father and with Christ.

( ^ *This para. is influenced heavily by the article from Lucy Lind Hogan.* ^ )

Jesus extends the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in him. Here is a mystery! We get to experience the same perfect union and perfect love with God in Christ! We come to know the absolute love of God for us.

### **We do good for others because of God's love**

Theology

We then turn to face the world God has made. We seek to serve others in that world. Why? Because it needs doing? Certainly it does, but more so, we serve because God wills it, and we love God, and because it is God's nature to love the world. Everyone in the world! All of them, from the least to greatest. In serving them we serve God's love.

### **Mystery and Manifestation**

Challenge

So then, brothers and sisters, let us swim in the richness of the mystery of God's love within Godself and God's love for us; indeed, that God wants to include us in the pool of the Godhead. Let us be so drenched in that mystery and love that when we take our turn out in the world, people will see us and wonder, "What are you connected to?" Then we can share with them God's love, God's forgiveness, and God's invitation to the table.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever. Amen.

### **Other influences:**

*Commentary, John 16:12-15 | Mark Holcomb | University Chaplain, Olivet Nazarene University | A Plain Account, 2016*

"This week is Trinity Sunday, the week we attempt to move beyond the "activity" of the Spirit and Pentecost, to explaining the Spirit and the nature of the Triune God. How do you explain existence? How do you explain the claim we make of a God expressed in three forms?"

*Holy Textures, Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours, John 16:12-15, David Ewart, 2013.*

"...we need to hear this brief section from Chapter 16, not as Jesus giving a lecture on the doctrine of the Trinity, but as a personally intense commitment of abiding, continuing, present love / loyalty / protection / guidance / bonding with his followers then - and now - and always."

*More Than Hearing Podcast, Year C, Trinity Sunday, 2019 - [www.morethanhearing.org/year-c-trinity-2019](http://www.morethanhearing.org/year-c-trinity-2019)*