

This morning preachers all over the world are carefully selecting their every word, struggling to explain the sacred mystery of the Holy Trinity. Hoping and praying we don't accidentally go out on a limb and say something ORIGINAL, or God forbid: confuse our congregations with heady theology that seems like nothing more than splitting hairs. Despite years of learning scripture, time devoted to prayer, theological study, master's degrees and even PhD's in divinity, we all struggle.

Some preachers are describing geometric symbols like triangles and overlapping circles like you see on the cover of the bulletin, while other preachers are grasping for analogies about how the trinity is like:

- a three-leaf clover, or
- an egg made up of an outer shell, the white, and yoke,
- a three-way light bulb,
- water in its different states of liquid, steam, and frozen solid
- or the southern favorite: a biscuit covered in sausage and gravy.

But unsurprisingly, all of these analogies walk a thin line between heresy and orthodoxy and have zero chance of ever doing the Holy Trinity justice.

One commentary¹ I read this week compared the revelation of the trinity to a football game where God the Father played the first half of the game all by himself... The Son and the Holy Spirit were sitting somewhere on the sidelines out of view. Sometime in the 3rd quarter, also known as the "fullness of time," God sends the Son into the game. After some big plays, God dramatically pulls the Son off the field and puts Jesus' followers, also known as the Church, in to finish the game, coached by none other than the Holy Spirit.

¹ Hunting the Divine Fox, Robert Farrar Capon

The Old testament of the Bible contains stories of how the people of Israel experienced God as *Yahweh*, the Great "I AM" revealed through a burning bush, pillars of cloud and fire, and on mountain tops. But Jesus, The Word made man, God incarnate, and The Holy Spirit, the Advocate came seemingly late to the game and frankly threw people for a loop.

In our gospel lesson today we find Jesus, preparing his disciples for his arrest and crucifixion. If we go back to the football game illustrations, we're at the part where Jesus is about to be dramatically pulled from the game and his disciples are preparing to take the field. Before Jesus leaves, he's giving them a heads up about the new coach who will soon be calling the plays.

Jesus says that he has many things to say to his disciples but they cannot bear them now, and that the Spirit of Truth (The Holy Spirit) will come and guide them and speak to them and declare to them the things to come as they are ready.

Can you just imagine what "things" Jesus might have wanted to share with his followers, but they weren't ready to hear?

That the earth was round and revolved around the Sun? That would have saved poor Galileo a lot of trouble

That the crusades, slavery, nuclear weapons, and exposing people to certain cancer causing chemicals were a bad idea

That loving our neighbors means not discriminating based on age, race, gender, orientation, disability, or religious beliefs, or origin of birth.

And, maybe what exactly The Holy Trinity, God in three persons is all about.

It would have saved the early church a great deal of trouble if Jesus would have sat them down and explained exactly how he was:

- both fully God and fully Man,
- eternally begotten of God the Father yet not lesser than the Father

- existing from the very beginning when The Word was spoken and all creation came into being,
- and how the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet they are not 3 separate Gods but ONE God, co-eternal, co-equal, and indivisible.

It took us a really **long time** to sort out what we believe about the trinity.

Councils were held

Scripture was debated

Heresies were identified and denounced

Some Bishops² were banished

And finally, hundreds of years after Jesus died, the Creeds were written stating what we believe.

This pattern of sorting out what we believe has repeated itself over and over again throughout the history of the church. We do the best we can to describe and discern what we believe given the encounters we've had with God over time without all the information we desire. But let's be honest, sometimes we don't know what is going on, why it's happening, or what we should do about it! We walk by faith not by knowledge.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth that "we know only in part, we see things dimly now, but one day we will see face to face." We have to keep this in mind when attempting to describe or define God.

Lutheran Pastor and author Nadia Bolz-Weber³, says "I can't imagine that the God of the Universe is limited to our ideas of God. I need a God who is bigger

² Arius (presbyter), Theonas of Marmarica (bishop), Secundus of Ptolemais (bishop)

³ Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful ,

and more nimble and mysterious than what I could understand and contrive. Otherwise, it can feel like I am worshipping nothing more than my own ability to understand the divine."

We study stories we've heard about God in scripture which we believe still speak to us today, imparting universal truths. And we share the ordinary, everyday stories we have of our own lives with each other in order to see contemporary encounters with the divine.

God is always revealing God's self and calling us into deeper relationship with him and with each other. We've heard about God's vision for creation, a peaceable Kingdom; where there is no war, pain, hunger, illness or fear. We continue to hear the Spirit of Truth calling us to share God's love with those deemed outcast and stranger, to add more seats at God's banquet table, to draw the circle ever wider.

The movement of our sacred story has always been from me to WE. From the individual to the collective.

Which really is what God in three persons, is all about: unity, diversity, and relationship.

The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston, a Native American Episcopal Bishop and theologian believes, "the Trinity teaches us that holiness does not lie in being the same. It lies in **love** holding difference together."

God's very self is modeling for us what it means to be a creative communion of love, companionship, and solidarity.

It's painfully apparent today that we are far from realizing God's dream for us. Countless conflicts around the world and in our own nation testify that we are still struggling to live into this connected, communion of love, caring for each other and promoting unity with God and one another.

Earlier this week our Presiding Bishop, The most Rev. Sean Rowe wrote a letter from Geneva where he is meeting with “global partners of the World Council of Churches and the United Nations Refugee Agency,” entitled Acting Faithfully in Troubled times⁴, reflecting on the churches role in responding to what is “unfolding around us” namely the “recent travel bans, denial of due process, military deployment to California, cuts to foreign aid, public health, and programs that have long fulfilled the Gospel mandate to care for the vulnerable, children, and those who are hungry and sick.”

Bishop Rowe named how the church, “At its best, ... is capable of moral clarity and resolute commitment to justice” and said, “I believe we can bring those strengths to bear on this gathering storm. Churches like ours, protected by the First Amendment and practiced in galvanizing people of goodwill, may be some of the last institutions capable of resisting the injustice now being promulgated. That is not a role we sought—but it is one we are called to.

...we are part of a global communion of hope in the Risen Christ. We do not stand alone as we live by our baptismal promises: to persevere in resisting evil, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. In these troubling times, may we find courage and resilience in our identity as members of the Body of Christ.”

Which is to say, we’re the ones on the field now, the ball is in our hands. Let’s remember whose team we’re on and what we’re playing for. It’s up to us to advance the Kingdom of God here and now.

We may never intellectually understand the sacred mystery of the Holy Trinity but we know the triune God in whose image we are made and we know what we have been called to do in Jesus’ name.

May the love of God enfold us, the companionship of Christ uphold us, and the fire of the Spirit embolden us, now and always. Amen.

⁴ [Acting faithfully in troubling times: A letter from Presiding Bishop Rowe – The Episcopal Church](#)