

**TRINITY SUNDAY begins the second half of the church year.** The first half of the church year beginning with Advent and ends with Pentecost Sunday, which begins our focus on the life of Christ. We call this second half ordinary time but there is nothing ordinary about it. **It is an extraordinary time of the year when we focus on the church's life and mission.** Some have called Trinity Sunday the "great hinge" of the church year. Others have called THIS DAY, "TRINITY SUNDAY" the "GREAT PAIN"! Why? **Because THIS IS THE ONLY SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR that focuses on a doctrine instead of a historical event or person, it seems so abstract, complicated, and downright boring.**

I vividly remember an event from my life in seminary. One of my classmates was chosen to preach in chapel during the week between Pentecost Sunday and Trinity Sunday. **It seemed only fitting that he might choose to preach about the "Trinity."** His father happened to be a Pastor also, and made the trip from St. Louis to hear his son preach. While we were socializing, the day before he was to preach, I remember Pr. Wilson blurting out to his son, "Eddy (that was my friend's name), whatever you do tomorrow, don't preach on the trinity! You will put us all to sleep." How SAD!!! **Let me ask you a question...Does the subject of GOD put you to sleep???**

**Most churches find it important to confess the trinity.** We would feel very strange not talking about **God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** We don't want to discard it from our worship life. But few of us know why it is important. Few of us would ever want our pastor to preach on the trinity. **It seems like an invitation to possible confusion and maybe total boredom.**

INSTEAD WE SPEND ENERGY TRYING TO EXPLAIN THE "HOLY TRINITY." We have developed all kinds of interesting illustrations and examples to explain the trinity—**THE WHOLE IDEA OF "one God" in three persons. Let me cite a few of them for you.**

**Water, H<sub>2</sub>O, one element,** comes in three different forms: liquid, solid, and gas/rain, snow, fog

**Father's Day will be here in a few weeks:** and many Father's are known to others as: #1: Fathers, #2, Husbands, #3, Sons. 3 different roles, One Person.

**Today, when we speak of: one God in three persons:** we think of God/Father, Jesus/Son, HS/Sustain, Friend. What the early church had in mind was very different from what we think of today. **"Person" is actually a translation of the Greek word, persona, which refers to the mask an actor would wear in the theater.** So, in the case of the trinity, one God in three persons is comparable to one actor playing three different roles, wearing a different mask, a different persona, to play each role.

One of the greatest leaders and theologians of the early church, Saint Augustine, wrote a massive work, **On The Trinity, that has greatly shaped our understanding of the trinity today.** It took him ten years to write and is actually not one book but fifteen books all on the Trinity. In that work he developed that famous formulation of the trinity that we see reflected in much church teaching, hymnody, and even art. Perhaps you have seen the visual portrayal of it. **There is a triangle that at each point portrays a different person of the trinity - Father, Son, and Spirit.** In the center is the word God. Between each person of the trinity and the center is the word is. **So, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. Then between each person of the trinity are the words is NOT.** So, the Father is not the Son. The Father is not the Spirit. The Son is not the Father, and so on.

Augustine looked at the world around him and saw examples of the trinity everywhere. **One well-known example went like this: LOVE.** Even Jesus said that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We say, "I love myself." "I" is the subject of love, the lover. "Myself" is the object of love, the beloved. **And "love" is the action of the lover for the beloved. It is all one activity with three distinct parts: the lover, the beloved, and love.**

Such are the ways we often try to explain the trinity. It isn't easy. **It seems to require a lot of intellectual gymnastics.** It seems to have its own kind of strange logic and rationality. For example, have you ever heard of "Trinitarian math"? Normal math is  $1+1+1=3$ . But Trinitarian math is  $1+1+1=1$ . It is indeed mysterious and confounding, reflecting the reality of a God who defies human explanation.

**The doctrine of the trinity has not been without its critics.** The other two great monotheistic faiths, Judaism and Islam, have complained that we Christians need to make up our minds. **Do we believe in one God or three Gods?**

The trinity is really something altogether quite different. We miss the point of the doctrine of trinity and what it is to accomplish when we treat it as some sort of ideology or doctrine that we "have to" accept and believe.

Rather, the doctrine of the trinity is the result of our experience of **BEING IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** **THE TRINITY is the way we talk about a God whose love we experience and encounter in the gospel of Jesus Christ.** We can't talk about a God who loves us like this without using Trinitarian language. **It is because God loves us like he does, that we must speak of God as three in one, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

**A classic example of basing the doctrine of the trinity in the experience of the gospel of Christ is in today's reading from 2 Corinthians.** With this benediction, Paul brings to a conclusion this letter. In the four previous chapters Paul has had to defend the authority of his apostleship after his critics have attacked the authority and legitimacy of his apostleship in every way. Paul's defense is not so much a defense of himself personally but a restatement of the gospel of the crucified Christ. He has warned the Corinthians, but his final word to them is a blessing. It has to be this way for Paul because the basis of his call for a change among the Corinthians is not his anger or personal indignation but God's love for them in Jesus Christ. ***Paul's last word to them must be love because that is God's last word to them.*** The only way Paul can talk about a God who loves the world like this is to talk about his experience of Christ in the power of his Spirit.

Paul can't talk about the God who loves them like that without resorting to the language of the trinity. **For Paul, the trinity is never just about the division of power within the person of God but is always about God's love for the world in Jesus Christ.** It is no accident that the Trinitarian formula that Paul uses here is slightly different from later Trinitarian formulas. **It begins not with God but with Christ and then follows with God and the Spirit.**

***"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."***

It is first because of his experience of the love of Christ that Paul must resort to Trinitarian language **to talk about the God who loves the world like this through the power of the Spirit.**

**TALKING ABOUT THE POWER OF GOD'S SPIRIT...** There is a story about a young man who grew up in the South, in "cotton country," in the summer, before air conditioning became something almost every home had. Several of those summers I spent working on my uncle's cotton farm, down in the Mississippi delta, just outside of my birthplace, Cleveland, Mississippi. It was hot work, hard work, bringing in a cotton crop. It still is, but technology has made it a lot easier than it was back then.

When the crop had been tended for another day, the weeds chopped from between the cotton plants, in the evening everyone would gather on the front porch. We would rock and talk and laugh in a futile attempt to escape the ever-

present heat and humidity. And sometimes, on a really good day, the leaves of the trees would begin to rustle. And the conversation would die down, and everyone would just sit back and enjoy the summer breeze, the gift of the breeze. We didn't know where it came from. We didn't know where it was going. But we knew it was there, because we could feel it. **YES, IT WAS A MYSTERY!!!**

**Is there still mystery to the trinity?** Yes. The trinity will always sound irrational and confounding. Trinitarian math will always sound absurd. But the real mystery of the trinity is not simply its complexity or a strange sort of logic.

**The real mystery of the trinity is this:** Why does God bother at all? Why does God bother with us at all? Why does God bother to love us like this? Why does God bother to be this merciful, this compassionate, this generous? Perhaps someday we will know the answer to that question. But even if we never find out, it won't matter. **BUT THANK GOD HE LOVES US...EVERY ONE OF US....**

She was your typical awkward adolescent. She was convinced that she was an ugly duckling, fat and plain and surely never the kind of girl that any boy would ever give the time of day. But she went to the dance anyway, hoping against hope that that one particular boy she had secretly had her eyes on for months would pay attention to her and, hope against hope, might even ask her for a dance.

She stood where all the ugly ducklings usually stood: off to the side, out of the way, almost hidden because she was too ashamed to be visible, out in front, public, where she was convinced everyone would make fun of her.

But then she was stunned, absolutely stunned. Unexpectedly, surprisingly, miraculously, that very boy she had so secretly dreamed about came to her. There was no ridicule. There was no laughter. **There was no rejection to which an ugly duckling such as herself had grown to know. Instead, there was an invitation ... to dance!** She of all the beautiful girls in that room was asked to dance by this boy!

Shocked, amazed, overwhelmed, thrilled, she could not believe what happened to her. There was only one question she wanted to ask. Why had he noticed her? Why did he want to dance with her? Why did he bother to pick her?

Then she thought the better of it. This was no time to ask such questions and probe the mystery. No! This was simply the time to enjoy the dance - **and enjoy the dance she did!**

**Why does God bother to love us like this?** Why is God TRYING TO SHARE HIS COMPLETE BEING, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons with us? After all these years, 1000 upon 1000, why hasn't He given up...**Perhaps this is the time to leave questions like that unanswered. This is no time for an explanation—**

**INSTEAD, IT IS A TIME FOR ACCEPTANCE—SO YOU CAN ENJOY YOUR DANCE, YOUR**

**“TRINITY DANCE” WITH ALL OF GOD!! Amen.**