

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today is Trinity Sunday. It is the last of the seven major festivals of the church year, which are all celebrated in the first half of the year. Those festivals, in case you're wondering are (in order): The Nativity of Our Lord (a.k.a. Christmas), Epiphany, Transfiguration, The Resurrection of Our Lord (a.k.a. Easter), Ascension, Pentecost, and Holy Trinity. So today ends what I call the festival half of the church year and next Sunday begins the long Green Season, which is also known as Ordinary Time. I've noticed that among clergy types in recent years it has been popular to describe Trinity Sunday as the only church festival dedicated to a doctrine, and then to complain about how hard it is to preach on this doctrine. I don't buy it. For one thing, isn't the incarnation that we celebrate at Christmas a doctrine? We don't just celebrate Jesus' birthday at Christmas, we celebrate God becoming one of us, coming to us in Jesus to save us. And isn't the resurrection that we celebrate at Easter a doctrine? We proclaim Jesus Christ risen from the dead. The incarnation and the resurrection are both doctrines. They are central teachings of the church that help to convey to us the Good News of God's love for us. My hope in the next few minutes is to help us see that the Holy Trinity that we celebrate today is not some esoteric bit of church trivia, but rather a profound summary of our Christian faith.

As is appropriate to this Sunday, I'm going to try to make three points in this sermon that really ultimately the same point 1. That the Trinity is Who God is, 2. That the Trinity is How We Relate to God, and 3. That the Trinity is Good News.

1. **The Trinity is who God is.** We didn't know this from the very beginning. Jesus never used the word "Trinity," and he didn't teach the doctrine explicitly. In fact it took 300 years for the church to come to the Trinitarian understanding of God that finds its expression in the Nicene Creed, and another century or so to hammer out some of its further implications. And it was not an easy sell. At every stage there were currents that pulled in different directions. But ultimately the doctrine answered the question: "What just happened?" That is to say, what was Jesus all about? What was the meaning of his incarnation, death, and resurrection? What does that do for us? Who must Jesus be in order for the Gospel message of the church, the message of love, forgiveness and life, to be true? Who must *God* be for this to be true?

The fact that the doctrine of the Trinity developed in human history and was not explicitly and directly revealed by God, dropped out of heaven on golden plates or something, has led any number of people to reject it as a human invention. That is understandable, I think, but it also depends upon a certain understanding of the divine that is itself problematic. As we discussed briefly in *On The Way* this past Thursday, it depends upon a Greek philosophical tradition that sees God as absolute, unchanging, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and probably some other "omnis" I've forgotten about. But the God of Israel whom Jesus claimed as Father was more relational, more personal than that, as you might expect just given the fact that Jesus can call God "Father." Personal relationship is built into that idea of God. And if that is the case, if God is someone personal, someone we relate to, then the development of that relationship, both in history and in our own lives, should probably be expected. If you're a very young person you will probably not understand this yet, but those of you who are older will have experienced that all relationships change over time, and in the best cases they grow and develop. And you will also understand that it takes time to really get to know another person. So it should be no surprise that it took the church 300 years to come to know God as Trinity. And let's not forget that Jesus himself hinted at this kind of development when he said in our Gospel reading

last week, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” I’m going to go out on a limb and say that the Trinity was one of those things.

2. We’ve already gotten into my second point, that the **Trinity is how we relate to God**, but I did say that my three points this morning were really the *same* point. In our Evening Prayer service after the readings, and the sermon when there is a sermon, we quote the words of the book of Hebrews, chapter 12: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by the Son.” The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ was a game changer. It fundamentally changed the way God relates to humankind. Long before Marshal McLuhan in the 1960s, God understood that “the medium is the message,” that how you convey your message is at least as important as the message itself. What else does it mean that the “Word [of God] became flesh and dwelt among us,” as John writes in the prologue to his gospel? In Jesus Christ God joins God’s very self to our humanity. In the face of Jesus we see the face of God. This is why the traditional form of Christian prayer is addressed to the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as we heard last week, the Holy Spirit, the often-neglected member of the Trinity, is the ongoing presence of the absent Christ, the ongoing presence of God in our lives, the means by which we relate to God the Father through God the son.

3. And that is surely Good News, which is my third point. **The Trinity is Good News.** We say the creed every Sunday here at Grace, and I expect there are not a few of you who will be happy to know that we are back to the shorter Apostles Creed next Sunday, which we use for most of the year. The creed can seem a little formulaic, a little like a test or an oath. But the Creeds were developed originally in connection with baptism, when a person became a part of the Church, and it was desirable to have a succinct way of indicating what that meant, a comprehensive summation of the Church’s faith that the newly baptized person was claiming as his or her own. And that faith is a marvelous thing. I’d like you to see the creeds as another way that the Gospel is communicated in the course of our worship. All of this is Good News! – not only that God created us and the world, but that God went so far as to become joined with us in Jesus Christ, that God is fully invested in the created world and in the world’s fate. We matter to God. The world matters to God. In the death of Jesus we see that God will do anything to repair the broken relationship with the creation, in the resurrection of Jesus we see that God can and will conquer the power of sin, death, and evil, and in the ascension of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit we see that God continues to be invested and involved in the world through the church, those who by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit have come to know the Triune God, who put our trust in the promises of that God, and who live our lives as if those promises make all the difference in the world.

One of my new favorite hymns does an excellent job of summing up the good news of the Trinity. Have a quick look at hymn #665 in your ELW. We’re not going to sing it this morning, but I want to look just at the first and last verses:

*Rise, shine, you people! Christ the Lord has entered our human story; God in him is centered.
He comes to us, by death and sin surrounded, with grace unbounded.*

*Tell how the Father sent the Son to save us. Tell of the Son who life and freedom gave us.
Tell how the Spirit calls from every nation, God’s new creation.*

May that be our song, and may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.