

# Trinity Sunday

Rev. Tom E. King - May 31st, 2015

A teenager named Charlie and his dad wanted to spend more time together, so they got season tickets to the local hockey games. Their seats were directly behind one of the nets, and they often came to the glass to chat with the goalie during breaks in the game. These conversations happened at every game the entire season.

At the final game the goaltender invited Charlie and his dad to a party: "We are having a party at our house tomorrow. Why don't you guys come; my son is about the same age as Charlie, and we would love for you to come."

The dad paused for a moment, and then said, "Wow, that would be like church on Trinity Sunday." The goal tender said, "I don't know what you mean." Dad replied, "You know, the Trinity. I'm the father. Charlie is the son, and you are the goalie host."

Why such an irreverent story about the Trinity in church? And on Trinity Sunday, no less. I told the story about Charlie and the Goalie Host to make a point, to be a bit playful: I think it is important for us to hold all our treasured beliefs and concepts lightly. The tighter we cling to them, the more we assert that they are absolutely and literally true, the less helpful the concepts are.

Here's how we got the doctrine of the Trinity: as the early church grew and expanded it became interested in developing a way to share the Gospel with new people who had no religious background. Theological and doctrinal formulas were developed as a sort of short hand to introduce the Gospel to those who had not heard the message of Jesus.

Church leaders recognized that they experienced God in three ways: as the creator, the one who is the source of all that is; AND they believed that in Jesus God was present in a unique way; AND they knew that God's presence and influence continued among them long after the death of Jesus.

Eventually these three ways of knowing God were combined into a formula of three in one. Folks thought this was a pretty way to describe the connection between God, Jesus, and the Spirit of God they knew to be active in their lives. Beautiful poetry to describe something they experienced and wanted to convey to others.

Then the church had a meeting and this poetry became official. Before long it was not only the concrete dogma of the church, but many people said without the doctrine of the Trinity the whole of Christianity falls apart. A far cry from poetry trying to describe the different ways we experience God.

After many church councils, the spilling of much ink and much blood, the doctrine of the Trinity became the official stance of the church, as you can see in our liturgy for today. Whenever poetry becomes dogma, we always have a problem.

So, here is the scoop on the Trinity: A Lutheran pastor tells this story about her daughter. It is certainly a more reliable story than the one about the goalie host. You know you can depend on Lutherans to tell the truth. It was Trinity Sunday. The minister and her family had guests for lunch following the service. They were talking about how difficult it is to preach on the Trinity. The young daughter says, "I don't see what is so hard about it. Look, here is Grandmother: Grandfather knows her as Martha. Mom, you know her as Mother. And to me, she is Grandma. Same person, three roles, three names. What is so hard about that?"

The daughter of the Lutheran pastor invites us to back up beyond the official church meetings. Back up beyond the theology and liturgies that came from the church' official stance. Erase what you have heard; erase what you have been taught. Listen to your own heart and pay attention to what you feel.

Standing on the beach at sunrise or sunset, we realize that water has hit against this shore for millions of years. Beneath the water lies an entire world of marine life. The remarkable world of nature – the remarkable world of the human body and mind—the remarkable way the universe continues to grow and develop: only the naïve could dismiss the idea that some remarkable divine presence is at work here. God the Creator, alive and well.

Look at the teachings of Jesus. Listen to him challenge the dogma of his day that got in the way of loving God, loving neighbor, and loving oneself. Listen to how much risk he was willing to take to defy the customs of his day to love, respect, and bless those who needed love, respect, and blessing the most. Notice to what happens to you when you think about the remarkable way faith in Jesus has touched your life and the lives of billions of people over the past 2000 years. Jesus the Christ, alive and well.

And look at the invisible forces at work in all of creation: at the subatomic level – too small for even the most sophisticated instruments to see or measure. And at the other end of things, the cosmic level: the discovery of more and more galaxies that have been there all along but have been too far away for us to see. Growing information about dark matter, black holes, and the 96% of the universe that is invisible. The end of apartheid in South Africa, the growing awareness that we are part of a global community where justice and peace are the only way for us to have a future. Needless to say, these ideas

threaten many people and prompt them to violent defense of things the way they want them to be. But if we don't destroy the world and one another, the subtle divine movement of goodness and justice will eventually soften the sharp edges of the world just as it has softened the sharp edges of our own character. The Holy Spirit, alive and well.

So, Trinity Sunday, the doctrine of the Trinity, reminds us that God is indeed known to us in different ways. The problem is that we have tried to build a box, a fence, and container of some sort to contain divine mystery that cannot be contained.

As we stand in awe of creation, as we are called to emulate the grace and compassion of Jesus, and as we are comforted and made uneasy by the nudging of the Holy Spirit – let us go forth into the world God has made, led and molded by the values of Jesus, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Amen.