

In the name of God, the creator who brings us new life, Jesus who redeems us and the Holy spirit who strengthens and guides us. Amen

Today is Trinity Sunday. Many of my seminary classmates talk about running for the hills, when it comes to preaching on Trinity Sunday. It is one of the most difficult doctrines in Christianity even though it is one of the most central. Most of you know the doctrine of the Trinity from Sunday school or confirmation class: The Trinity is one God: Father Son and Holy Spirit - Three in one – one in three. As I teenager, I found the best way to approach it was not to think about it too much, even though I said it all the time. Father Son and Holy Spirit – it was what I said when I crossed myself – it was part of the fabric of worship in church and in my prayers.

As I grew up, things didn't change much – the Trinity was there and I didn't mess with it, and I certainly didn't try to explain it. Several years ago, before I went to seminary, my relationship with God changed. At a silent retreat, I had a deep spiritual experience of God – God became real. It wasn't that I didn't believe in God before. It was that now I knew God was real. I couldn't prove it and didn't need to. I had no words for it. I just knew God I had experienced God. However, with this experience, the Trinity became harder for me, because the God I experienced didn't feel like a Trinitarian God. If I had to pick one of the persons of the Trinity that I experienced, it would have been God the Father, the Creator, the source of all life or maybe the Holy Spirit. Once again, I decided not to think about it too much.

I was still in that place when I got to seminary and in seminary I decided to take a class on the Trinity. I needed to get all this stuff straight before I went out into the world to preach. My first response to some of the readings that were assigned for the class was– that's not my experience of God. The readings were critical of those Christians who identified with only one of the persons of God. I thought - you can't tell me how I experience God. My next response was that's too confusing – much of the writing about the Trinity seemed strange and convoluted. There was lots of technical jargon about hypostases instead of persons. There was lots of discussion about the three persons of God that had one will, one energy, and one substance.

However, in the midst of all this reading and our discussions in class - something happened. I began to see the beauty of the Trinity. I began to hear about a God that loved me and was present in my life day in and day out. When I let go of worrying about exactly how one argument flowed from another and whether or not the analogy worked, I heard about a God who loved us so much that God sent God's very self so that we could know God and that God was still present with us. I was amazed and I wondered how I would invite others to this experience. It will never be easy or simple thing because the Trinity is a mystery. The Trinity attempts to describe God and since God is beyond anything we can imagine. We will never be able to fully describe God in words.

You might ask then why even try? I would say because in trying to describe the God we know, we discover God. I offer you the Trinity as a way to enter into the story of how our God is with us and how God is in our lives. This is what the trinity is - an attempt to explain how we experience God. Listen to this description of the Trinity from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century – listen to it like poetry or a story rather than an explanation. Listen to the beauty of the words.

*Once upon a time, way before the beginning of everything -- not at the beginning, but before the beginning -- God the Father, who is love and who therefore must love, God the Father speaks his own name; He says his own word. And God the Son is begotten -- true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. The Son is the second person of the Trinity. Later, after the beginning, the Son will become incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and will be born as Jesus of Nazareth. The Son is what happens when the Father expresses Himself, when the Father reaches out in His love. Now, the Son loves the Father, for the Son is the Father's word, the Father's self. And the Father loves the Son, totally and without reservation, and so the Father and the Son are bound together in love. This love, which binds together the Father and the Son, is also real. This love is God the Holy Spirit -- the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. And the Son and the Spirit are of the same substance, the same stuff, as the Father; that's the only stuff there is. In this way the Godhead is complete. Three persons, each distinct, each real, each from before the beginning, each and all are one God.*

When I get to the end of this passage, I am left with images of love – of a God that loves us so much that we are caught up in the swirl of that love. I hear about a God in whom there is an outpouring of love – love that is given to us.

The Trinity tells the story of our God. Without it who would we say Jesus was? How would we talk about the Holy Spirit? How we would express the different ways that we as Christians know God who loves us so much? The Trinity tells our family story. It is probably why it is so central to our prayers. In the Trinity, we know God as God is revealed in the person and life of Jesus -- and this revelation happens by and through the Holy Spirit. The Trinity speaks to how we discover and experience who God is. So how do we enter into the Trinity? How do we explore the ways in which we as Christians experience God through the Creator, the Christ and the Spirit? There are many ways but the way I offer to you this morning is through scripture. In Scripture we hear about God as Father, Son and Spirit.

Let us look at our readings today. In Exodus, Moses has an encounter with God. He is standing on holy ground. This is a God whose love is “creative and seeks us out, even in the barren desert and graciously calls us to live in the way of life and truth.” This is a glorious God who is the God of our Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of

Isaac and Jacob and yet this is a God who attends earnestly to the affairs and struggles of God's peoples by being present in the places where God's people are.

In Romans, we hear that it is by the Spirit that we can conquer the deeds of the flesh. It is those who are led by the Spirit that are the children of God. We can call God, Abba - a child's word for father, because through the Spirit received through Jesus, we are God's children.

In the Gospel, we heard about Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus, a leader of the Sanhedrin, comes to Jesus by night and poses a question. He asks about God giving Jesus power to work signs and wonders. Jesus doesn't quite address his question, but responds that what is necessary to see the kingdom of God is to be born from above – to be born of water and the Spirit. Jesus tells Nicodemus that God so loved the world that he sent his only son.

From these readings emerge images of our God. The readings today never mention Father Son and Holy Spirit in one sentence, but in them we hear about God of Israel who is present with his people. We hear about Jesus who taught us that he was from above and that we must be re-born from above by water and the Spirit. We hear about the Spirit who bears witness that we are the children of God.

The Trinity is how we tell our story. Instead of trying to figure out exactly how it works, we are invited to immerse ourselves in it and give ourselves over to be formed by it. The Trinity is in our worship. The Trinity is in our scripture. The Trinity is in our lives. The Trinity is how Christians describe and experience God. Yes - it is a mystery. One theologian refers to the mystery beyond us, the mystery among us, and the mystery within us, which are all the same mystery. We can push the Trinity away and have nothing to do with it or we can enter into it and see what happens.

In engaging the Trinity, maybe we can come to know God - the source of Life, God the Savior - love made flesh for us and God the Spirit - God's power for justice and peace. Maybe if we enter into the mystery of the three in One we can go beyond ourselves and closer to God.