

Recently, I was at a party for friends who were in town for the weekend. As I came in to the house and sat down, about three of them gathered around and said, "We have a question for you but you may not want to hear it. We were talking about this until 3 am last night." I sighed thinking – oh no – not another one of these religious questions my friends want me to sort out for them and I was right. I sat down and one of them looked at me and asked – Is Jesus God? I paused wondering if she was serious and then I said– "Yes. Jesus is God." The friend asking the question then said – I don't believe that. There was a brief silence and all of a sudden the others who were gathered jumped in and began trying to convince her that Jesus is God. I saw why they had been up until 3 am. But my friend stuck to her guns. She had taken a class and she had studied scripture and from everything she had read she was convinced that Jesus was not God.

Now your reaction to someone saying that they don't believe Jesus is God might be shock or you might be surprised saying "Jesus is God?" As one of my seminary classmates said, he didn't figure out that Jesus was God until seminary. I tried to put in my two cents into the conversation that was continuing - explaining why we teach in the church that Jesus is God, that it comes from what we read in scripture and that whether Jesus was God or not was a huge argument in the church for centuries, that this is why the "Jesus part" of the Nicene Creed is so long, because exactly who Jesus was had to be so carefully explained. We say these words every Sunday in the Creed when we talk about Jesus - **G**od from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father My friend didn't care. For her Jesus was not God.

Now this friend of mine is a very faithful person. She goes to church. She goes to Bible study. She prays to Jesus and she believes that Jesus is divine. Jesus is her Lord and Savior. She is a Christian, but for her Jesus is not God. God the Father is God. Now technically, according to doctrine, my friend is a heretic. The Christian Church teaches that Christians believe that Jesus Christ is God. We say that we believe that God is the Father, the Son and the Spirit, the Trinity – three persons one God. Now what I found interesting is that I realized that a lot of us say we believe in Trinity without really engaging it much further. At least my friend was exploring who she experienced God.

I asked my friend to describe who Jesus was for her in her life as a Christian.

Everything she said sounded very much like descriptions of Jesus from people who do say Jesus is God. It was just the words in front that were different. The experience of Jesus behind the words was very similar. I was glad my friend felt the freedom to say what she believed and I hoped she would have the freedom to continue to explore the nature of God. The others gathered around didn't not want to let her be where she was. They wanted her to agree with them – to say she believed the "party line".

It is scary to get away from the party line. Often when we realize we have difficulty with understanding a God that is Three in One, we don't go too much further, worrying we will end up in a place where we find out we really don't believe. The place in-between not engaging the doctrine of the Trinity and full belief in the Trinity is a scary place. If we go to that place, we run the risk of ending up at the place where my friend was saying that Jesus is not God and not knowing where to go from there. But if we don't attempt to engage our faith's way of describing God, we can miss out on deepening our experience of God. The Trinity is how we Christians describe our God. Just as Hindus say they believe in a supreme being that has unlimited form, Christians believe in God as three persons in one, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. The persons of God are the different ways that we encounter the one who creates us, loves us and guide us.

And yes it is complex. Even though the Trinity may at first sound simple and even though it permeates much of our worship language and our hymns, the Trinity is complex and a mystery. The Trinity is a doctrine in human language which tries to describe a God that is beyond our comprehension. Engaging the Trinity is not easy. Engaging the Trinity takes time but can yield rich rewards. Just as you wouldn't expect to be a black belt on day two of starting karate or maybe not even in year two, the teachings of the church, like many other practices, take time. They are meant for us to grapple with, to struggle with and to see where they fit into our experience of God. They are not to shut us down or to shut us out. They are not meant to be put away.

And remember God's time is God's time. Unlike Karate there are no real markers in this process of faith – no yellow belt, no brown belt and no black belt. God, I think, is not into such things. And just as no Karate master is ever the same – we are all different practitioners of our faith, bringing our own selves, our own thoughts, feelings and interpretations to our faith – to our life as Christian believers.

Where do you start with exploring the Trinity? Well Scripture is a good place.

Scripture is where the early Christians began to realize the different ways they experienced God working in their lives. Father, Son and Spirit are all over the New Testament. Take our gospel reading this morning. In it you can hear the interplay of the three persons of the Trinity.” This passage comes from the farewell discourse where Jesus is saying goodbye to the disciples and telling them of the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Jesus is indicating how the Spirit will serve to guide the disciples in truth. The Spirit will glorify Jesus and will declare or teach his followers what the Father needs to have known about him.”<sup>i</sup> The Spirit, the Father and Jesus are all at work together so the disciples have what they need to go out into the world and proclaim the gospel.

There are many other scriptures in which we hear God described as Father, Son and Spirit. You will find many in the gospel of John. Doing a web search on the Trinity will get you started on finding scriptures to engage with.

Another way to think about the Trinity is to listen for descriptions of God in worship – in the hymns and the prayers. Think of how many times and in how many ways we speak of the Trinity in our worship whether it is Father Son and Holy Spirit or Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier or Mother, Christ and Guide. We began our worship today by acknowledging God as the Trinity. Don't forget about our catechism – the outline of the faith in our Book of Common Prayer. Go to page 846 where God the Father is described. A few pages later there is a description of what it means when we say Jesus is the Son of God and how the Holy Spirit is revealed among us.

And of course there are the many books that have been written on the Trinity over the last 2000 years. Some are a little heavier than others. The descriptions go from describing God as the “[one being](#) who exists, simultaneously and [eternally](#), as a [mutual indwelling](#) of three [persons](#).”<sup>ii</sup>, or as the mystery [beyond](#) us, the mystery [among](#) us, and the mystery [within](#) us that are all the same mystery<sup>iii</sup>. Look around for the one that is right for you.

We can also enter into the Trinity by reflecting on our experiences of God –how we experience the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit in our lives. In your prayer life and in your reflecting, ask yourself who you encounter God to be - Creator, Savior or Guide or all three?

Entering into the meaning Trinity opens up the possibility of deepening our experience and understanding of God. It is the experience of exploring who God is that is important – not so much the doctrinal words of our faith. The words are meant to challenge us, to lead us and to make us think about who our God is. It is easy to dismiss those parts of the Trinity that seem not understandable or that we disagree with. We probably won't ever fully understand the mystery of the Trinity, but exploring the Trinity is a way of exploring our God, a way of getting to know our God. God doesn't care where we are on this journey of exploration. God just wants us to enter into the journey of getting to know God, to finding our way back to God. This is the invitation from the God who creates us, the God who loves us, and the God and who is still guiding us every step of the way.

---

<sup>i</sup> Pulpit resource John text

<sup>ii</sup> Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity>

<sup>iii</sup> F. Buechner, *Wishful Thinking A theological ABC*, Harper and row, Publishers,