

John 16:12-15  
St Mark – June 12, 2022  
Trinity Sunday  
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## The Trinity

We have an unusually short gospel reading this morning. Short, but it does a great job of being confusing. Perfect for today. The Sunday we focus on the Trinity.

This passage along with countless others lead us to our acceptance of the Trinity. Acceptance, but not complete understanding. If you've ever tried to actually explain The Trinity, you've probably hit a wall or two as you did it.

One Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But those three are one. It just doesn't make sense at least within the limitations of our humanity. God isn't possible within those limits. God is so much more than we can fully understand.

I've always been drawn to the unexplainable, but that doesn't stop me from wanting to understand. I seem to believe that if I understand then the world, the entire universe will make sense.

For example, I accept that I will never really understand solar physics, but if that had been my passion in life I'm confident that I could have understood it. In my own hubris I believe I can understand anything I study long enough and then there's The Trinity.

God, The Father, our creator. God, The Son, our redeemer. God, The Holy Spirit, our teacher. Three persons are one person, One God.

We'll come back to this in a moment, but first I'd like to take a look at our statements of faith. The creeds we use to affirm our faith.

Most often it's the Nicene Creed that follows the sermon we hear on Sundays, but today we change that. Bishop Cowden reminded me that by Episcopal tradition we affirm our faith on this, Trinity Sunday not with the Nicene Creed, but with what we know as "The Creed of Saint Athanasius". If you've ever read this creed you probably understand why it's used on Trinity Sunday.

The creed is long, almost three times the length of the Nicene Creed. It's found on page 864 in The Book of Common Prayer in a section of the prayer book titled, "Historical Documents". "Catholic" is used throughout the creed and it's important to note that the reference isn't to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the universal church, as in the entire Body of Christ.

The creed was used by the Church of England, but was never made part of our standard liturgies. Our national church's explanation of the creed draws attention to its length and anathemas or strong language against those who would deny its doctrines. There is the implication that these are the reasons we limit its use.

Length and anathemas aside, no one can dispute that the creed makes clear the triune, the three in one, nature of God. The co-equal nature of The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.

This creed is thought to have been formalized after Athanasius' death and is named for him because it quite simply states his teaching. His teaching that caused quite a stir in his day.

Athanasius died in 373 when he was about 75-years old. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "He was short in stature but compensated with a towering intellect and a fiery tongue." He assisted Bishop Alexander of Alexandria at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 and a few years later succeeded him as Bishop of Alexandria when Alexander died.

Athanasius lived in a time of conflict within the body of Christians.

Whenever I feel downhearted at dissent and conflict in the body of Christ I turn to history and am somewhat encouraged to know that we are no worse off than our brothers and sisters of the past when it comes to the church experiencing fracture.

I'm reminded that from healthy conflict, conflict that causes study, prayer, and a quest for understanding, that from healthy conflict comes discovery and furthers our understanding and adoration of God.

The argument of his day was over Arianism. The idea that Jesus, the Son of God, was a creature like, but not of the same substance as God the Father. The church struggled through conflict as they were challenged to reconcile the oneness of God with their knowledge of Jesus and their experiences of the spirit.

The Council of Nicaea, the one that Athanasius attended in the year 325 with Bishop Alexander, condemned Arianism. That certainly didn't stop the controversy or the trouble that school of thought caused him throughout his life.

The debate centering on the relationship and substance of Jesus and God continued for decades and at several times Athanasius was exiled for his outspoken, and thought by some, aggressively harsh defense of his belief.

His belief that The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “three Persons in one substance”, what we know today as the Trinity.

He held fast to what we almost casually take as accepted fact today. The belief that only our understanding of The Trinity allows for redemption. For it is only Jesus, who was and is God, that is able to reconcile humanity to God. Only God can snatch us from the jaws of Satan and redeem us to Himself by defeating death in the body of The Son.

The doubts of the Arians have made their way down through the centuries. I see remnants of their beliefs express today by Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, but by the mid-four hundreds The Trinity, as we know it today, had become the fundamental and widely accepted foundation of Christianity.

We are greatly blessed by the serious work done by Christians throughout the centuries since Jesus walked the earth. Those devoted Christians worked through gut-wrenching conflict and bitter disputes. Disputes used by Satan to divide us and used by God to guide us on our path toward life eternal. Those devoted Christians have given us the lens by which we view the scriptures today. The lens of The Triune God.

Although we never find the word Trinity used in the scriptures, old or new, we see countless scriptures that speak to the concept of The Trinity, that speak to the idea of The Trinity, that speak to the fact of The Trinity. Both Genesis and Isaiah elude to the Trinitarian view of God and by the time we get to the scriptures written after Jesus conquered death there are endless references to our understanding.

John speaks of the Word made flesh after he tells us that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. As we read that first chapter of John's gospel it is clear that Jesus is the Word. The light that shines in the darkness.

Peter, Matthew, Mark, Paul, Luke, and most importantly Jesus speak to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being together in purpose. I believe that it is our human limitations that cause us to doubt their unity in being.

The gift of earlier Christians' discernment allows us to build on their good work. Today as the larger church we struggle with the place of women in the church and the confines of gender as it relates to sexuality. It's hard to imagine what conflicts the church will experience in centuries to come.

Whatever our conflict I trust that the Holy Spirit will be in the thick of it. I trust that the Holy Spirit will work in us to defeat the urging of Satan. The urging of Satan to close our hearts and minds with hate and condemnation.

I trust the Holy Spirit to feed the love we have for one another. I trust the Holy Spirit to encourage respect and openness as we strive to understand the views of our sisters and brothers in Christ that oppose our own.

From the past we learn that the struggle to understand the enormity God is not new to us.

Today I give thanks for the enormity of God. I give thanks for The Spirit of truth and the guidance he gives. I know that he glorifies Jesus and that they are one in the same with God, that together they are the Three-In-One, The Trinity.