

**Trinity Sunday
May 30, 2021**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the spirit.
Amen.**

In the Church's liturgical calendar, today is Trinity Sunday.

Today is also the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend ... a time to remember those in the United States military who have died defending the freedoms of this nation. For many this brings to mind those who died in wars of the past ... WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam. However, the Taliban is currently retaking lost territory in Afghanistan as US troops leave after twenty years of warfare that killed over 2,300 soldiers ... soldiers who will be remembered tomorrow on Memorial Day ... soldiers who were sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives. In addition to those who were killed, over 20,000 have been wounded in Afghanistan, which doesn't include those who live with the invisible mental, emotional, and spiritual wounds that are felt daily.

This weekend remembers the worst act of racial violence in this country ... the Tulsa Massacre where 100 to 300 Black persons were killed, thousands left homeless, and a prosperous Black business district was burned to the ground. It is just one piece of the American story that has been brought to light in recent years, yet it adds to the long untold narrative of systemic racism in our country that has been hidden in the telling of our history. That systemic racism came into clear focus just a year ago this week with the killing of George Floyd.

All this while the Israelis and Palestinians are living with an uneasy truce in the homeland of Jesus. Another mass shooting in this country as Republican and Democrats fight over the meaning of the Second Amendment. And the list goes on ... and on .. and on ...

Yet, for the Church, today is Trinity Sunday. This is the only Sunday of the year devoted to a theological concept. So, here are my thoughts about the Trinity.

Trinity Sunday emphasizes the theological belief of One God in three Persons. Here are the words from the Creed of Athanasius: "... we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance." According to the Athanasius Creed, if you believe this you go "into life everlasting." If you don't believe this, you go "into everlasting fire."

This all started because of a fight over whether Jesus was with God at the beginning of Creation, or did God "beget" Jesus at some point after the Creation. And remember, this

argument was happening in an era where time was measured by sundials, and moon phases, and seasons of the sun.

In 1054 of the Common Era the Christian Church in the East split from the Christian Church in the West. This split is called the Great Schism and the two churches became known as the Roman Catholic Church in the West, and the [Greek] Orthodox Church in the East. The schism was over whether the Holy Spirit “proceeded” from **just** the “Father” or from **both** the “Father and Son.” In Latin it was one single word ... “filioque.”

The question is: Do you know which side of the argument we ... as Episcopalians ... stand on? Does the Holy Spirit “proceed” from **just** God the Father, or does the Holy Spirit “proceed” from **both** God the Father, and God the Son? The larger question is: Does it make any difference to you and your faith today?

This part of Church history had a profound impact upon the world then, and its legacy continues ... not because of who God is, or whether the Third Person of the Trinity came from just God, or God and Jesus. This schism made a difference in the world because of the wars that were fought, and the people who were killed, and the cultures that were changed ... all because of one Latin word “filioque.”

For some, this is a big deal ... but not for me. My thinking is that we encounter God most deeply in our hearts and souls ... not through our intellect. We can only describe those encounters with the holy ... the sacred ... the divine ... through our imagination and creativity ... through metaphor, and poetry, and art. The intellectual arguments don’t really interest me when I think about systemic racism in our world today ... or people dying in the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem ... or those people who have lost loved ones in questionable wars.

You see, although I find the history interesting, I am rather cynical about the intellectual, theological arguments and explanations about the nature of God. Imagine ... if you will ... gathering together ALL of the different understandings of what the divine is from every human being on this planet ... include all the different religions and even the atheists that say there is no God. (What does that God that the atheist denies exists ... what does that God look like?) So, from every nation, culture, religions ... every person on this planet ... we gather all their ideas and concepts about what “God is” in any way that they choose to define “God.” After you do that, it should be a rather comprehensive definition of “God.”

But “God” ... whatever “God” is ... “God” is bigger than that. There is no one way to explain “God” as if we humans could define God and put “God” in a box ... no matter how large the box may be. If “God” is truly “God,” then “God” will always be larger than what we can ever comprehend or even begin to articulate.

So, in my cynicism ... **Who do we think we are** defining God as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” Who do we think we are spending time talking about this when we are faced with the issues that really matter in people’s lives?

That being said, I'm assuming that all of you have had some experience in your life that you would describe as an encounter with the divine ... the sacred ... the holy ... however you want to name it. Sometimes those experiences are profound, and sometimes that are like little moments of feeling blessed by something beyond one's self. Once we have had an experience like that, we seek to have other such experiences ... and we share our experiences with people who have had similar encounters with what they call holy. Yet, every experience is different ... just as each of us is different.

Today we celebrate Trinity Sunday: One God in Three Persons. Yes, this Trinity is one of the Christian mysteries: one entity, yet three expressions. The God that brought all Creation into being. The God who came alive in human form as Jesus. The God who lives amongst and between us.

I believe this is much more than a theological construct. Our First Lesson this morning is from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. It is the prophet's encounter with the King of the Universe, calling Isaiah into his prophetic ministry. The Lord asks Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" In the face of such a theophany Isaiah answers, "Here I am; send me!" This is the God of all Creation ... this is the God known as the Father.

The Incarnation brings the divine to life in human form as Jesus, God's Son. We honor that life when we recognize the sacredness of life in each and every person on this planet. According to our Baptismal Covenant, we promised to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves," and to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being." It is through those promises that we acknowledge and affirm the divine nature alive in all humanity.

And God's Spirit? The power of God is known "when two or three are gathered." It is in community: from our core family of origin to the worldwide human race. God's Spirit is present and at work when people gather as congregations, as a village, as a tribe, as a people connected by language, and people united by a cause. God's Spirit does not know national boundaries and God's Spirit is at work among peoples separated by rivers, who live beyond mountains, and who occupy distant shores. God's Spirit is present and at work when people are in harmony; and God's Spirit is at also at work when there is discord. God's Spirit calms the troubled soul, and yet it also challenges apathy. God's Spirit abhors the status quo yet comforts the fears that accompany change.

In the reading from John's gospel this morning we hear Nicodemus asking Jesus about his statement, "No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus is obviously a literalist ... and is confused by Jesus' use of metaphor. But Jesus explains the Spirit with a simple example from a universal experience: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

This is the Trinity, one God in three expressions: God known in Creation; God known in all humanity; and God known in community.

Yes, you are in the presence of the divine when you are struck with awe at the sight of a sunrise over a placid sea, or a sun setting behind thunderheads and bending a rainbow out of a recent downpour; and when your compassion awakens you to see the soul of another in their eyes as they seek to be welcomed; and when the stranger you try to avoid because they look different becomes an angel with a gift. You know you are on sacred ground when you share the miracle of a child being born, and you are present when a friend or loved one dies; when your prejudice is broken by recognizing the face of the other as your own; when the wilderness into which you have been driven becomes the path to a new life. You know you living in holiness when you see God in the life around you; when you are surprised by the divine presence in you and recognizing the divine presence in your enemy; when God's Spirit shocks you out of your ordinary life into an extraordinary reality.

We live in a world where we take too much for granted, live in fear of those who look, dress, speak, act, or think differently from us, and seek security by building unshakable lives. God, in creating us, made us in God's image, and calls us to fullness of life, not merely a secure existence. In Jesus God gave us the example of one who lived that full life, trusting in God to provide, and giving of himself so that we, too, might all know that fullness of life. Jesus died on the cross because he threatened the systems of security in both the religious and political establishments.

However, the grave could not hold the divine nature of God that was alive in Jesus, and his Resurrection speaks to the new life beyond what we see as death. And God's Spirit, which was present at Creation, is still with us now, opening for us the immense possibilities of living as if we are one worldwide community, each individual a precious divine spark, each and every person, regardless of tribe, or language, or nation ... and dare I say religion ... each and every person a child of God.

Today, in the Christian calendar, is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday after the Feast of Pentecost. It is devoted to the Triune God ... One God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

However, today is also the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend ... a time to remember those in the United States military who have died defending the freedoms of this nation ... soldiers who were sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. And, this weekend remembers the worst act of racial violence in this country ... the Tulsa Massacre ... and the systemic racism that came into clear focus just a year ago this week with the killing of George Floyd.

All this while the Israelis and Palestinians are living with an uneasy truce in the homeland of Jesus. Another mass shooting in this country as Republican and Democrats fight over the meaning of the Second Amendment. And the list goes on ... and on ... and on. So, rather than spend time with an intellectual concept, let's bring to life our experience of the holy ... the

sacred ... the divine in our lives. Let's try to leave this world a better place than when we entered it.

In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.