

**Trinity Sunday
June 12, 2022**

**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.**

Today, in the Christian calendar, is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday after the Feast of Pentecost. It is devoted to the theological concept of the Triune God ... One God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the roots of the Trinitarian formula are found in the Hebrew Scriptures, the theological principal was not formalized until the Council of Nicaea in 325 of the Common Era, and the Nicene Creed is the product of that council of early bishop of the Christian Church.

In some "high" Episcopal Churches, a Creed called the Creed of Saint Athanasius is recited instead of the Nicene Creed on Trinity Sunday. The Creed of Athanasius is found in our Book of Common Prayer on page 864 in a section called "Historical Documents of the Church." Interestingly, it is printed in 4-point type font, so it is barely readable ... at least to these aging eyes. Anyhow, here is a portion of the Creed of Saint Athanasius:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated.

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. ...

It goes on from there ... but I think you get the idea.

A few quick points:

- Trinity Sunday is the only Sunday in the Church's calendar devoted to a human theological concept, and not to a story about Jesus.
- Secondly, although the concept of the Trinity was celebrated in churches since the Council of Nicaea, there was no one special day for its acknowledgement until 1162. That

was when Thomas Becket was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury on the Sunday following Whitsunday ... Pentecost ... and immediately declared the day Trinity Sunday. Interestingly, Thomas Becket was ordained a priest, just one day before he was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury.

- Finally, these creeds affirming the Trinity were composed to refute what the Church considered heresy. It was a way the Christian Church used to distinguish itself from other religions ... other expressions of faith.

Heresy ... I've been called a heretic ... and to be honest, these creeds don't really speak to me. But let me tell you what does.

After almost five decades of ordained ministry my faith is not determined by my theological "beliefs" ... those concretized statements of our creeds. Rather ... for me ... it is determined by "trusting" ... trusting that there is a loving God who wants me, and all humanity, to live in the fullness of life. I therefore feel that Trinity Sunday is more about how we experience God than about trying to define something that is beyond explanation.

I began this sermon, as I do with each of my sermons, with the invocation:

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.

If the divine spark of God exists anywhere than that divine spark was present at the beginning of our universe ... in that immensely dense particle that exploded in the Big Bang and thus is in every piece of stardust that makes up all of creation ... which includes each one of us. Astronomers tell us today that there are over two trillion galaxies in the universe, and each of those galaxies has billions of stars. Most of those stars have planets circling them, and "moons" circling the planets.

Do you know how large one trillion is? In English speaking countries it is 1 followed by 12 zeros. In many non-English speaking countries it is 1 followed by 18 zeros. I don't know which trillion the astronomers are talking about, but two trillion galaxies is a lot of galaxies ... and then each galaxies has billions of stars. And, the God of all Creation is the God of all those stars, and planets, and moons ... and every single atom in this entire universe.

So here we are, one small planet circling around one modest size star, in one of those two trillion galaxies, trying to define the God of Christianity against the God of the Jews, or the God of Islam, or the God of the Hindus, or the God of all the other religions on this planet. Just who do we think we are? I honestly don't think we can put the God of all Creation in a box. No matter how we might want to define God ... God is always more than that.

The God of all Creation brought forth life as we know it on this planet. As humanity evolved different groups of peoples spread out in different directions, making their own life in the various environments they found. As peoples and cultures grew in sophistication they began to

put words to their experience of a holy presence ... each in the context of their own physical and social environment. Our bible is the story of one such people, the Jews, and their experience of the relationship they knew with this holy presence.

One of those Jews was a man named Jesus who lived a life so full of the holy that people saw God alive in him. Jesus taught about what the world might look like if we were to allow God to be in charge ... he called it the Kingdom of God. He brought people into the fullness of life ... the lame walked, the blind could see, the deaf could hear. He railed against a religious belief system that separated peoples into us and them. And in his teachings ... and his actions ... people saw God alive in Jesus.

So, what about God's Spirit? People of different faith expressions have found the power of God "when two or three are gathered." They found God's Spirit in community ... from nuclear family 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 bound by language ... as people called together for a Gay Pride parade. 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 present when there is discord. God's Spirit calms the troubled soul, and yet it challenges apathy. God's Spirit abhors the status quo, yet it also dispels the fears that accompany change.

We are a people of faith. We are people who experience the holy in our lives. The words we use in our creeds are those that have been handed to us by the Christian Church, but the experience of the holy transcends those words. That is the difference between trusting in the God we know, and making an intellectual assent to a set of concretized "beliefs."

I have told this story before, and I found myself sharing it with someone just recently. I think it captures something that at times is difficult to articulate. Several years ago I visited a woman who stopped her chemotherapy for lung cancer and chose to enter hospice homecare. She was not a member of the congregation, but her daughter, and the daughter's wife, lived in Lincolnville, and I had baptized the couple's infant twins. One of the godmothers, an aunt of the twins, had three children, and when the family came to the baptism the aunt asked if I would baptize her children as well. The woman I went to visit was the grandmother of those five children.

During my visit with this woman, after we had talked for a while, I asked her why she had decided to end her chemotherapy. She said, "Every night I lie in bed and talk to God. When the doctor told me that I would go through another round of chemotherapy treatments, and then they would do a PET scan to see what the lung cancer looked like, something hit me. I know I am going to die, but I don't know when. I can either let the doctor decide that, or I can let God decide that. I really don't want to know what my cancer looks like, and I hate the chemotherapy. So, I talk to the doctor very rarely, but I talk to God every night ... I decided to just put it in God's hands."

I asked her if she was afraid of death. She paused, took a deep breath, and said, “No.” And, as she made the sign of the cross she said, “I see it as a melding ... a blending. When I lie in bed at night and pray, I know I am praying to the Father. When I was sitting in the chair getting my chemotherapy, I knew that Jesus... the Son ... was with me. And, I’m now living with my daughter and grandchildren, and you’ve come to visit. That is like the Spirit. And when I die I think they will all meld together and be One with God and all who are with God.”

I wasn’t exactly dumbfounded, but I, too, knew the Spirit was there with the two of us at that moment. I said, “Do you know that this Sunday is Trinity Sunday?” She started to cry. I asked her if she minded if I shared what she had to say with others. She responded, “You mean other people think like I do?” I answered, “Lots of people!”

The Trinity may be a theological concept that separates our “beliefs” from other religions. But, when we experience God in different ways, and articulate that experience, we are talking about having a faith ... not about the concretized words that try to capture “beliefs” in some kind of creedal formula.

You see, faithful people of all religions experience God when they are struck with awe at the sight of a sunset behind a storm cloud. Or, when they see the soul of another in their frightened eyes as they plead for acceptance. Or when the stranger they try to avoid becomes the angel with a gift. You know you are a person of faith when you see a child being born, or an elder die ... and you know it is a sacred moment. You are a person of faith 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 are a person of faith 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. You are a person of faith 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 we seek security by building unshakable lives. However, 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 ... he threatened a concretized set of beliefs. 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 is a child of God.

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.

The Creed of Saint Athanasius

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord, So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He

ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.