

Genesis 1: 1-6
Romans 8: 12-17
May 31, 2015
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
Trinity Sunday

Today we celebrate Trinity Sunday. It is a day when we take the opportunity to reflect on a concept which is so central to orthodox Christian belief and yet is so little understood. That this is so should not cause us undue alarm. It is not possible to comprehend a mystery. What we call the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit or, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is an attempt to describe the indescribable—to comprehend that which is far beyond understanding.

Would it shock you if I were to say that there is no *trinity* in the Bible? With the exception of Matthew 28: 19-20 the three names are not directly mentioned together. In the passage from Matthew which we call the Great Commission, Jesus calls his followers to “make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....” And even here Jesus does not explain what he means or how the three names relate to one another. It is as if he is telling the disciples, “Don’t analyze this, just do it.”

In the book of Acts 2:38 Peter tells the crowd to “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and you will receive the Holy Spirit.” Being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is the usual language used in the early church. Indeed I have been told by some Pentecostal Christians that we should only baptize in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; otherwise the Holy Spirit will not be given. This view is complicated by an episode in Acts 8: 16 where people have *only* been baptized in the name of Jesus and *have not* received the Holy Spirit.

It is clear to me that that the first Christians were comfortable with the fact that their experience of God had three distinct dimensions. There was God, the Creator of the universe.

There was Jesus, the Son and full expression of God in human form who restored humanity to our original and intended relationship with God; *and* there was the living presence of God who is known by faith in Jesus Christ who was called the Holy Spirit. Early on there was no need to nail down how these three dimensions related to one another. There was no need to debate the intellectual problem of how there could be one God with three dimensions, three activities.

The reading from the Book of Genesis shows that God has a “spirit.” The word in Hebrew is *ruach*. It is translated “spirit,” “wind” and “breath.” Throughout the Old Testament there are numerous references to “the spirit of the Lord.” While they look forward to the coming of the messiah, believers of the Jewish faith are smart enough not to make a trinity but, in the words of Iris Dement, “to let the mystery be.”

My point in telling you this is simple. If you don’t understand the doctrine of the trinity, relax. Let the mystery be. Allow God to come to you and touch your life. You do not have to fit your experience into some formula. Whether your heart is lifted into light and peace by the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit—*it’s all God*.

I could spend the rest of this message explaining how the doctrine of the trinity came into being and all the pain, suffering and even death arguing about this mystery has caused over the past two thousand years—but I won’t. I will be happy to talk with interested persons some other time.

Instead I want to recall to your memory the passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans which we heard a moment ago. Let me read it again including the first verse of the chapter:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has set you free from the law of sin and death....So then, brothers and sisters we are no longer debtors to the flesh, obliged to live according to the flesh. For if you

live according to the flesh you will die; but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba!" Father" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact we suffer with him so that we may be glorified with him.

Observe that Paul refers to God, the Spirit and Christ Jesus. Through Jesus God has taken away the power of the flesh to separate our souls from God. The New English Bible translates "flesh" as "lower nature." It is our lower nature which is still striving to be like God. It is our lower nature which makes us believe that we are the center of the universe. It is our lower nature which makes *our* experience of the world the yardstick of what is good and bad. It is our lower nature which is always asking "What about *me*? What's in it for *me*? Why *me*?" Paul is not being judgmental when he says that a life lived according to this self-orientation leads to death. He is stating a fact. I would take it a step further. A life lived exclusively for "me" is death of the worst kind, that is *spiritual death*. Whether there is a place of eternal torment called Hell or not, a life condemned always to "asking what about me" and who never learns that heaven is found in living relationship with God, humanity and the earth is starving in the midst of abundance. Yet, who of us has never known the horrible bondage to the self-centered life? Who has not experienced the loneliness and sadness of observing happy people and feeling that we are on the outside of something wonderful, looking in?

And yet, Paul says that there is no lock on the door to the joyful gathering. Indeed the door is wide open. As Jesus says in John's Gospel, "I *am* the door." What awakens us to a desire to give up our deadly self-centered life to enter the freedom of the children of God? What allows us to yearn to join the community of love and the life

that really is life so much that we will leave our demand to be treated like God so that we can be loved and accepted as who we are—in my case as Stewart?

For Paul it is the Spirit. Notice that Paul does not say, “the Holy Spirit.” It is the breath of the living God. It is the Spirit which awakens our awareness that slavery to the life of the flesh is empty and lifeless. *It is the Spirit* which awakens in us a desire for something more—a life lived for God and for the wellbeing of people and the whole of creation. It is *through the Spirit* that it dawns upon us that there *really is* a life that is higher, deeper and wider than that lived for worldly security and personal gratification; and *through the Spirit* that we come to the amazing awareness that we are already adopted by the power of infinite love. We cannot earn it. We have only to arrive on God’s door and step over the threshold. It is then that we receive the greatest homecoming ever. Our spirit unites with God’s Spirit and we rejoice and embrace our sisters and brothers, crying together, “Abba!” Amen.
