

**Romans 5: 1-5**  
**John 16: 12-15**  
**May 26, 2013**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**  
**Trinity Sunday**

This weekend as citizens of the United States we remember and celebrate the lives of men and women who willingly sacrificed their one chance at life to preserve and protect our freedom and way of life. An essential part of this freedom is the ability to worship without government interference or control whether we are Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or any other religion. It is therefore not only appropriate, but essential that on this weekend of reverence we exercise this freedom by worshiping God revealed in his son, Jesus, by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which Christians for nearly two thousand years have called the trinity.

Where did "the trinity" come from? As far as I can determine there is only one verse in the New Testament where the three "persons" of the trinity are mentioned. That occurs in Matthew chapter 28:19 where Jesus, risen from the dead instructs the disciples to baptize the nations, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The fact is that there truly is no doctrine of the trinity in the Bible. Yet in scripture we meet God the father and creator of all things visible and invisible. We meet Jesus, the only son of God, and we meet the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament there are many references to the "Spirit" or "the Spirit of the Lord" or "the Spirit of God." Spirit in Hebrew translates *ruach*: meaning "breath" or "wind". In addition, after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, Jewish scholars applied the term *shekinah* to indicate the dwelling of God with Israel. The Greek word which is translated "spirit" is *pneuma* which also can mean breath, wind or spirit.

Whether or not there is a trinity, there is certainly God, father/creator, Son/redeemer and Holy Spirit. And in the fourth century when all kinds of weird ideas about these three divine expressions were tearing the church apart, the best and brightest theologians descended on Nicaea in modern day Turkey to hammer out one official formulation which we now recite in the Nicene Creed and, in a later simplified form in the Apostles Creed.

The danger of having an official doctrine of the Trinity is that we argue about it and all the philosophical ins and outs of the implications of the doctrine. Of course this is good for theologians who get paid to debate these things. And since what we are talking about is a mystery, the truth will never be known. Consider it a perpetual jobs program for a small select portion of humanity. It's why I am grateful for sin. If it weren't for sin we wouldn't need Jesus and I'd be out of a job.

The consequence of turning the Trinity into a doctrine to believe is that we miss the life-giving importance of this understanding of God. Whether the Trinity is an accurate representation of ultimate reality, the three dimensions of God wonderfully reveal the fact that God is active in our lives as individuals and as a community. Indeed through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God creates community and completes our lives as whole human beings.

This morning's teaching of Jesus in John's Gospel is a wonderful illustration:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The key point in this teaching lies in the first sentence: "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now." Jesus states clearly that his teaching is not complete. The

disciples are not able or ready to hear them. He means, among other things, that on the mortal side of his death and resurrection, they are not capable of understanding. This message is consistent with all Jesus' teachings. The Good News is only Good and News until after the crucifixion and resurrection. Only after Easter will the disciples be *capable* of being taught and guided in the new life of faith. Even then, without a power greater than themselves to guide them in this new life they will be powerless to communicate the Gospel to anyone else. That is why in Luke, Jesus tells the disciples to remain in the city until they are clothed with power from above. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit which gives the disciples the wisdom and understanding to spread the message of salvation.

This is so important! It means that Jesus did not leave a wrapped up package of teaching that we must implement blindly. His teaching is incomplete. It is the ongoing role of the Holy Spirit to bring to us Jesus' ongoing teaching. The wonderful implication of this is that we are never done learning. There is never a point at which we can cross our arms in self satisfaction and say I have learned all I need to know. I have graduated from the school of Jesus!

The joy of being a Christian is that there are always more experiences, always new and deeper insights, always new areas of growth and sources of meaning. And what is particularly wonderful is that Jesus' teaching through the Holy Spirit meets us at our level of understanding in order to awaken in us a desire, hunger to learn more. There is no one level of understanding that pleases God. God through Jesus by the Holy Spirit seeks us at our level. He seeks to awaken in us a sense of his love and acceptance that opens our eyes to see a new reality. Comes to where we are in order to lift us up to where he is.

This is important because it means that every human being has something to teach. We cannot discount the life of a single soul; for through the Holy Spirit every human being has something to teach us. Indeed it is by the Holy Spirit that we recognize Jesus in the face of one who is homeless, one who suffers from disability, mental illness; it is how we recognize the face of Jesus in one who is an antagonist, even an enemy. I propose to you that when we encounter difficulty accepting a person or react to them we are encountering our inability at that time to receive the teaching of Jesus.

Do we beat our selves up about this? Certainly not! But we should seek the grace of willingness to grow in understanding. We should seek the humility to recognize that our standards for others behavior is not the standard of God and we are a far cry from seeing with his eyes-eyes that we believe see through the eyes of Jesus.

There is always more to learn. In the words of the great Gospel song, there is always something *new* in the old, old story.

*And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song;  
Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long. Amen.*