

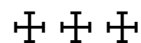
Since today is Trinity Sunday, our Feast Day,
I want to talk for a bit about the doctrine of the Trinity
and why we should care about it.

Kind of dry at first, and a little long I'm afraid,
but I think it's important and I hope you'll hang in there with me.

Today and for the next 6 months every service begins
with a theological statement that has been dismissed by
parts of the Church throughout history,
and even by people sitting here today

“Blessed be God,” we say, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”
Blessed be God - Singular. One God.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three.

It is a statement of doctrine & mystery,
AND it is at the heart of our faith and salvation.



About 350 years after the first Easter morning,
the Church that formed in Jesus' name was struggling
with the same question Jesus' disciples struggled with,
that every generation of the Church has struggled with:
who, really, is Jesus, and what does it matter?

The finest minds of their generation engaged this question
in a very public way.

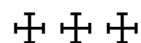
They were, mostly, priests and bishops. They were, mostly, men.
And like us, they were shaped by the world they lived in.

They pastored and worried about money and argued with each other
and loved each other and struggled with the temptations
of power and influence. In other words they were real people.
Faithful, flawed, BRILLIANT people.

The doctrines they developed about the nature of God
are summarized in our Creeds. The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed,
and that little gem, the Athanasian Creed,
tucked away on page 864 of the prayer book.

These brilliant theologians never claimed that the creeds describe God fully
or even 100% accurately because human words could never
capture the fullness of God.

What the Church continues to say, all these centuries later,
is that these Creeds are our best understanding so far of who God is
and what God continues to do in the world.
And that the triune God they describe is worthy of our love & devotion.



So, Trinitarian doctrine attempts to hold together a lot of ideas about God.

The first is that there is one God. One.

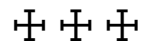
The God of Abraham and Sarah,
the God who delivered his people from slavery in Egypt
and from exile in Babylon.

The God who gave the Law to Moses and inspired the prophets.

One God, the Creator of everything.

The God of every person who ever believed in God
AND the God of every person who ever denied that God existed.

One God. One God.



And then there is Jesus. Who was called the Son of God & the Son of Man.
Who said he was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus said that he and God were one,
and yet he prayed on his knees and on the cross
to the One he called Father.

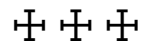
How can both claims be true?

How can there be only one God if Jesus and the Father are one,
if they are both God?

If this were just an abstract question, it wouldn't have been a big deal.

But the real debate wasn't about the nature of God.

It was about the nature of us.



For 2,000 years now, every 2.7 minutes a Christian somewhere in the world

asks an age-old question: "Why does it matter who Jesus really is?"

Isn't it really just about being a good person?"

The reason the answer matters is because one day your precious,

perfect child is going to be in a car wreck and is going to be arrested

for a DUI and for seriously injuring somebody

and then the police are going to find illegal drugs in the trunk.

Because one day your spouse is going to get caught

stealing money from her business

and your priest is going to be revealed to be a raging hypocrite.

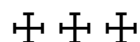
And that same day your other child is going to say you are
emotionally abusive and that trying to live up to your
unrealistic standards is exactly why she is this way,
and all of a sudden you're going to have this horrible moment
when you realize she is right.
About you. And what you've done.

And on that awful day of failure and sin and shame,
it is going to be so important for you to know
that Jesus died & rose again so that you and your spouse
and your children are loved in a way
that is not at all dependent on how good you are,
and that the way forward out of this horror
that you are desperately searching for is not based on
how many good things you did
or how nice you are or what your politics are.

Those ancient theologians are here to remind us
that a teacher cannot save you.

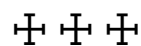
A teacher can only teach. Like a prophet can only talk,
and a healer can only heal. Like a revolutionary can only overthrow.

Only God can save you. Only God can restore you to unity with God.
And if Jesus is the means of our salvation, then Jesus IS God,
or Jesus is a liar.



And so it is with the Spirit, they say. If there is only one God,
then the Spirit that descends upon Jesus at his baptism,
the Spirit that descends upon the disciples at Pentecost,
the Spirit that draws the Church into unity & truth,
that marks us as Christ's own forever, must also be God,
or else none of those things are real. The Spirit is God.

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



The other piece of Trinitarian doctrine I want to focus on
is also the second reason we should care about Trinitarian doctrine.

Sometimes you'll hear clergy say something like,
"In the name of the creator, redeemer, and sanctifier."

Lots of us say that. I probably have.

It's usually an attempt to avoid gendered language about God,
which is understandable because of the ways the Church -
mostly men - have used that gendered language to exert
power over women.

Which by the way, is absolutely a sin against the name of God.

But the failing of that invocation is that it suggests
each person of the Trinity is defined by their one act.

That the Father is only the creator, the Son is only the redeemer,
the Holy Spirit is only the sanctifier.

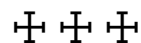
The brilliance of orthodox Trinitarian doctrine is it proclaims
the fullness of God is present in each person of the Trinity.

God the Father creates the universe, saves his chosen people,
and sanctifies them to be a sign to the world.

God the Son creates at the beginning as the Logos, redeems us on the cross,
and breathes the Spirit on his disciples.

God the Spirit blows over the waters of creation, saves us from division,
and sanctifies us as a new people.

Each person of the Trinity does all that God is capable of.
Because if not, then they are not God, and our faith is in vain.



There are a handful of terms people use to describe the divine relationship,
but the one I like is...interpenetration.

Each person of God is complete and unique and yet in their oneness
the fullness of the other two is also present.

The Father is not the Son but the Father and the Son are one.

The Spirit is not the Son and yet the Spirit and the Son are one. And so on.

Interpenetrated in one another. One, yet three.

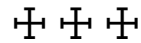
And it matters to us because Genesis says we are made in the image of God.

Separate. Unique. And yet interpenetrated with each other.

This is why good theology matters. This is why going deep matters.

Because good theology is not about showing off how smart
you think you are but about seeing that the divine,
interpenetrated nature of God...is reflected in you and me.

So let's talk about us.

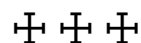


You are here today because each one of you is a wonderful,
complete, & unique creation of God.

But you are also here because you are made to be filled
with the wonderful essence of all these people around you.
Fully yourself and yet also full of one another's
love & presence & gifts & histories.

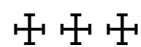
Three weeks ago Jonas preached about how he will always carry with him
his experiences as a member of Holy Trinity.
And how the children of Camp Peace will always be with him,
and how our hospitality & love & safety will now always
be a part of their stories.

And he could have added that Corinne and Eleanor,
our two young acolytes who have sisters but not brothers,
will now, because of the gentle, supportive presence
of that teenage boy with the crazy hair,
have a good shot at thinking that boys can actually be okay after all.



And this afternoon, some of our youth
are going to be confirmed at the Cathedral.

But just thinking of them as “our youth” is kind of the same mistake
as saying “creator, redeemer, sustainer,”
because they each carry the same fullness of Christian
leadership & generosity & wisdom that each of us do.

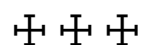


Megan Swett and Raymond Walker are about to be ordained priests.
I'm sure Megan could talk about how what her time here meant to her,
but I'm going to remember what her calm, steady presence
meant to us through the crazy Covid years.

Raymond's journey took a few twists and turns
but the gifts he's about to bestow on the people of St. Bede's
are possible because of the steadfast support of Paul McPhail,
Jeff Lee, Bill Clark, and Ernie Ramsay;
and because of the brilliance and courage of Dawn Diedrich.

And also today we're celebrating Pastor Endirias from
the Gift of God Church and our own Chuck Girardeau
for 40 years of ordained ministry.

40 years. I stand in awe of their pastorates,
of the ways they were messengers of God's love to children & adults,
to leaders & prisoners, how they gathered God's people
in refugee camps and school cafeterias
and made them all into houses of worship.



And then there's Joe Pearson, our deacon for several years
who died peacefully yesterday morning.

I went and looked at the plaque of 24 graduates from the 3-year
Education for Ministry that he and DeDe taught for so long.

I've long known that many of those EfM graduates were also
important leaders at Holy Trinity.

But yesterday I noticed something else:

that Mabel, Steve, Laurie, and Rob preceded Joe in death,
and that 5 of the graduates had suffered the death of a spouse,
like Joe did when Larinda died.

Our interconnectedness does not end at death. It only begins.

Our lives are our own and yet we carry the lives
of so many others within us.

People from different ages, different countries,
different experiences. And they carry us, too.

One. Yet Many.

+++

Trinity Sunday is not just the day to sing the world's strangest hymn
and to chuckle about an ancient doctrine
that only matters to church nerds and clergy.

Trinity Sunday is the day to glory in the interconnectedness of God,
to ponder the ways we are interconnected to one another,
and to give thanks that God would connect fully with humanity
in order to save us from death.

Amen.