

On the Trinity  
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Church of the Redeemer

Imagine that on the First Sunday of Advent, we began a sacred journey. Imagine that as darkness fell and light returned, as winter gripped us with anxiety and then relaxed her grip into a blooming spring, that every Sunday, we left the world of time and appointments to walk with an amazing person named Jesus of Nazareth who lived long ago and yet can be found today, who came to teach us a truth so dazzling that we have to go back year after year because even the wisest of us can only absorb the tiniest part of its immensity. No matter how often we go on this journey, it is always new, not because the story changes, but because we change.

Every year on Pentecost, that journey comes to an end. Our flight gently touches ground in the present moment. We arrive. We pick up our luggage at the carousel and we disperse to our various homes and concerns, rich with all that has happened, and now gifted with the time and space to sort out what we found.

Today, this Sunday, the Sunday of Trinity, we go through the door from Sacred into Ordinary Time. The door has two framing beams and a lintel. Three parts to make one threshold. Behind us, stretches where we have been and where we will be again when Advent comes and we take up the journey again. Before us, where we are going, is also the place we have always been, but seen through the new eyes of homecoming. We have seen the Son of God; we have received the Holy Spirit; and today, as we pass through the door, we are given a glimpse of God Godself, the God that our wise ones call the Trinity, One God in Three Persons, of one substance, yet each person distinct, a mystery so great that words can only suggest its immensity, but so important, because how we talk about God (or refuse to talk about God), and how we walk through the door between the worlds will influence everything else we do and say.

Most preachers on Trinity Sunday seek to find metaphors to explain how One God can be Three Persons and one God. Most of these metaphors, while interesting, really don't explain very much. I can say that I am body, mind and spirit, but I am simply describing three different aspects of a single person, not how three persons can be one. Likewise with another popular Trinity image that turns up again and again in children's sermons: water can be liquid, ice or steam, but it is still water. A third, which is favored by those wishing to minimize the overly masculine imagery of the Trinity will say, "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier," but that's only three job descriptions, not three persons. This is important, because we live in an age that likes to take wholes apart. If we want to know about the body, we dissect it. Our Universities are all divided into departments: anthropology, sociology, literature, mathematics, science that can't talk to one another because each is so specialized. This does not make us great in knowledge, only divided.

God cannot be divided. If God is Three Persons, God is also One. The mystery of One God in Three Persons cannot be reduced to a series of component parts. They knew this so deeply in the ancient world that they spent centuries pondering the nature and truth Trinity.

God is the whole intelligence and heart of Everything. Religion can help us awaken to parts of that everything, but it cannot contain it. That is why it would be good if we could talk about God at school or at work or any of the important places where people gather, because to talk about God is not to convert others to my faith; that is impossible, as to each of us is given our own faith, and the best we can do together is help each other understand what it is exactly what we trust and believe in; rather, to talk about God is to talk about ultimate concern, about Great Things: Why am I doing what I do? What is the best way to live together? Why is it important to love the earth? Or that most Biblical of questions: What is truth? When I enter life with reverence and care, God turns up. I cannot either prove or disprove God, because there is no way that I can get outside God to measure or apprehend God as something separate from myself. And so the mystery of Trinity. It emphasizes that there is ONE GOD, but that ONE GOD finds oneness through diversity. One God in Three Persons reminds me of relationships and suggests that all life is more intertwined than I might think. If I use the teaching of ONE GOD as a way of saying who is in and who is out, that Christians are superior to Jews or Men are superior to women, straight people are more righteous than gay people, white people are good and dark people bad, or human life is superior to other life; if I use God to do that, I blaspheme that God is three persons, by trying to make God into ONE RIGHT WAY. The Trinity is the radical assertion that the one God INCLUDES.

How can I understand such a thing? Today, since it is Trinity, I would like to be very daring and try, as best I can, to speak plainly about what I think Trinity is.

First, let's look at what our spiritual practice teaches. The life of faith is not about the heavens opening; it is about the simple gifts of life. In order to live, I must do three things. I must eat. I must drink. I must breathe. Thus in faith, I eat of communion. I drink the sacred wine and am washed in the waters of Baptism. When I sing, when I pray, when I read the sacred story, I breathe. The solid, the liquid, the breath. These three infuse life. This is both religious and scientific truth.

But how can I get three in one from the food, the water and the breath? I certainly can't get to an explanation of God, but I can begin to describe the human, and I think in the end that being human is what God most wants me to understand. So, beginning with the solid, my body is made of the same thing as the stars, the soil, the trees, the insects, the wolves, the deer, the otters, the grass, the dust on my window sill. Every day I nourish my body with these same elements and as I shed cells, I grow new ones, in this deep, mysterious synergy with the stars, the soil, the trees, the insects and all of that. Therefore, the way I treat this world says a great deal about the way I treat myself. I am literally not separate from the world. If I pave it, pollute it, plunder it, I am in a very real way plundering and polluting my own body. We could go a long way with this metaphor, but I'm going to stop here. The earth and I are separate persons, but we are one substance.

I am also water. Parts of my body, like my lungs, are 90% water. Blood flows through my veins. My veins are nutrient rich rivers bringing oxygen to all the inner parts of me. If I could see the network of veins within, I would see something that looks very much like the network of rivers and streams and tributaries that water our earth. I am a little earth watered with rivers and I drink these living waters every day. That said, to dam up rivers, to keep them from flowing into the sea, as the Colorado River no longer can all the time, is like the build up of plaque within my arteries. To fill the living ocean with plastic, to destroy its silver fish swimming is to have deep and real

repercussions upon my own inner tides and currents. I could go a long way with that one, too, but I will stop. The water and I are separate persons, but one substance.

And finally breath. Our beautiful atmosphere, like a gleaming sigh across the surface of the earth, so perfectly composed to give us life. In most languages, the word for breath is also the word for spirit. The baby becoming fully alive when the flesh and the blood are kissed by the animating air. In breathing meditation, we are taught that every time we breathe, we are in communion with God, literally infused with God. The tree of life is not a metaphor, but biological fact: the tree inhales our carbon and exhales oxygen. What a beautiful symmetry. That said, it strikes me as interesting that when we started to build smoking factories, we also began smoking cigarettes, becoming chimneys ourselves. And now that we have an economy that is absolutely dependent upon burning carbon, we are endangering the fragile envelope of air that may indeed be the breath of God. I am separate from the air I breathe, but we are one substance.

I am a single person, yet I am in full communion with earth, water and air. I am also in communion with you who are also in this communion. We are separate, and yet one, which is to say that we partake of the Divine Trinity: the One, the Many, the God who is one substance with all things. To practice Trinity, to breathe God's word, to receive the waters of baptism, the bread and wine of communion is to make me deeply aware of my own unique humanity and my inseparability, in the spirit, from God, the source and the fountain of Life Itself. In these perilous times, it might be the most important thing I can know. AMEN.