



## Sermon Synopsis –

**Trinity Sunday**     June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Preached by Carol Cook,  
Rector Emerita of St. Bartholomew's, Livermore

The main contribution of 7000 years of monotheism to religion is the idea that there is one God. Jewish people, Muslims, and Christians, we all say the same thing. One God.

My Hindu friends might say that there are many faces of god in that there are many manifestations of the creative force in the universe. Buddhists might say that the seed of the godhead is within each of us. Okay. This is how God invites them into relationship -- it's the way that works best for them. It's good.

But among the monotheists, my Muslim and Jewish friends have this question for me about the concept of the Trinity: "So. How many Gods do Christians worship, really? It looks like three to us." I usually answer this way:

In our Christian tradition, God revealed himself 7000 years ago as a whole new thing to some people in the Middle East. This new God was a god of people instead of place. Wherever we went, he came with us. (God was a 'he' in those days) God made everything, was strong and mighty to save, and was over all the other gods (and there were lots of them then.) And the most important things about this God was that he was One. Just One. Large and in charge. And we got it.

So the first Christians were Jews, and we understood about One God. But then the next Christians were Hellenists. The idea of more than one God was perfectly comfortable to them. So we had to explain to them all over again about the one God thing. It wasn't intuitively obvious.

Then, Constantine made Christianity legal, and orthodoxy became more important than ever before. With all those people knocking on the door of the church to try and get in, suddenly people were coming up with more and more outlandish ways to explain how we could have the God of creation and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and who and how it all worked. We **had** to define the concept of the divinity of Jesus, and that's where we came up with the doctrine of the Trinity. Fourth Century. Trinity.

Now there's been a lot of to-ing and fro-ing since the fourth century about a lot of theology, but the one thing that has stood firm is the answer to the question of how many Gods are there? And all we descendants of Abraham know that the answer is: [let them answer]. So we all understand the creator God, but where do Jesus and the Holy Spirit fit into that One God concept. That's the mystery of the Trinity. Notice that word 'mystery'? Yah. We'll come back to that.

Early alchemists theorized a universe made up completely of four elements: earth air fire and water. Last week we encountered the Holy Spirit as tongues of flame and a great wind. We meet Jesus in the waters of Baptism, and God created the heavens and the earth. Clearly, all four elements are reflected in the concept of the Trinity. What if I take the three entities of the trinity, and look at them not as a way for three separate things to be all together in one being, but instead look at how Father, Son, and Holy Ghost work together as one in a metaphor for how to be in relationship?

Consider Rublev's Trinity Icon. What's the first thing that strikes us? We see Three Angels who are genderless, but distinctly feminine looking. Talk about conceptual blockbusting! The one on the left is the Father, the Son is in the middle, and the Holy Ghost is on the right. There is a House and tree behind them, and a small window in front of the table on which they sit. (I don't know *what* the story is with the tablecloth in the holy card. It shows up nowhere else and it's weird. Trust me, there's a little window under there.)



*The Holy Trinity by Andrei Rublev*

You can look at this icon for hours each day, and arrive at a wholly new interpretation of it each time. Where are the Fingers pointing? What's in the cup? What would we see if we look through the little window?<sup>1</sup> Without any special preparation at all, what does it look like these three are doing? It looks like they're having Lunch! Look at the affection they have for each other. Look at how engaged they are with each other. They're in perfect balance, perfect harmony. And we're right in here with them. We're sitting at the table. Here. Pull your chair up here. This is for you.

*Perichoresis*. Like it? It's a Greek term applied to the trinity by theologians as early as John of the Cross. It's from the Greek root for dance (same like choreography) and peri- meaning around. Think about dancing around. Let's take those three angels and watch them dance.

Today's scripture tells the essential story: God's Creation is a dance. Our job is to live together in harmony, come together and go out again like the ebb and flow of the tide. Paul talks about living together in peace and harmony, loving, smooching, and gracefully embracing. Even the Gospel of Matthew says that doctrine is not as important as the dance. Some doubted (with their heads), but all showed up (with their hearts and their feet).

(A brief discursion: You know there would be a whole lot more Christians in Clayton if it weren't for Jesus. People like the liturgy, and the music, and the fellowship, and the spirituality, but they just founder on the question of who is Jesus Christ. If He's God's son, then he's not really God, and so why do we worship Him? If He is really God, then how could he be fully human? And how, exactly, does his death redeem our own deaths? It's a real stumbling block.

The truth is that somehow Jesus is both fully human and fully God. That is what the Church teaches, that is what the doctrine of the Trinity is all about. And it's a mystery. In fact, I try not to worry about it too much. If I know is that it is in the person of Jesus that I meet God, every day. I think about Him, I talk with Him, we walk together, and we know each other. Loving Jesus *is* loving God, and for me at least, to love God is to love Jesus. I can't figure out how to do the one without the other. That's why I am Christian.)

The doctrine of the Trinity keeps our theological thinking focused on the truth that there's one God, and that we encounter that God in three ways: Creator, Human Being, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the trinity is a way to teach about mystery without every completely revealing the truth.

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Nowuen's meditation on this icon led him to find the house of love, which he then carried with him through his days. From Behold the Beauty of the Lord by Henry Nowuen.

It's a brain-teaser, a paradigm, a holy riddle. We tell jokes about it, we wrestle with it, we're like little dogs with a big interesting bone about it, tussle, tussle. And in the past few years, I've come to see it more playfully than ever. God is just like that: " -- think about it *this* way, now think about it *that* way, let's see if we can have some fun with *this* idea." So Anglican!

So get involved. Get curious. Don't worry about getting it right, just think about God all the time and see what happens.

Doctrine and Dogma and Discipline and Teaching are all about making relationship with God. It doesn't matter a whit who you see God as. Not at all. It matters, though, that you long to know God, that you yearn for God, that you play and talk and sleep with God, and that you continue to grow closer over the years until finally you two become one.

This week, the doctrine of the Trinity has unfolded for me like a flower **not** to help me to understand God or to respect God or to fear God, but rather to help me to adore God, admire God, long for God's company and comfort, inhale God, dance with God, hold God's hand. God is playful AND awesome, majestic AND mundane, and we cannot possibly think our way to heaven. There's nothing left but to rise and adore the mystery of love. Amen.