

Trinity Sunday

Readings: Genesis 1:1 – 5, 26 – 2:4, Matthew 28:16 – 20

Trinity explanations – sigh! I'm over them. None that I've heard measures up. They are all too clinical.

I wonder if Christians become limited, corrupted even, by following agendas that others would try to set for us.

At our Minister's Assn, one person raised concerns about the Shack movie. He wrote to his church, affirming the positives, but offering specific criticisms for much of the theology apparently portrayed.

Me – haven't seen the movie. But I liked the book; the hospitable aspects of God as Trinity spoke to me.

Anyway, here is part of what another colleague wrote in response to the Shack critique:

I believe ... that if we resolutely and gently hold the orthodox line of a gentle loving God of compassion, who is always with us, no matter what, we do better than spending energy and time trying to counter this sort of thing.

Let's not play the game by "their" rules and engage in this "debate", but play it by God's "rules". I used to get really upset (well, actually, I still do!) but I now trust that our God is big enough to take care of things, in His way, in His time.

God is bigger than any of us can grasp. Try and describe even one person of the Trinity and see where that gets you. Even the theological practice of calling God or Jesus or the Spirit a 'person' can limit or even twist our understanding of and relationship with the Triune God.

God is actually without limits though God chooses to reveal Godself to us within time and space.

The first chapters of Genesis were written to address the worldview that fickle gods of good and evil wrestled together and produced the world as we know it. The writer's purpose was to reveal the true God, working order from nothing; progressively shaping and forming a beautiful universe.

In the creation story we see each member of the Trinity at work. The beautiful picture of the Spirit "hovering" over chaos, over the face of the waters, is at the very beginning. "Hovering" evokes the wings of a mother hen protecting her young, guarding her eggs. Creation begins by a tender act of grace. God speaks reality into being; Jesus the Word is actively involved. The creative act at the beginning of time reveals God's nature – three members at work. Creator, redeemer, life giver. Father, Son and Spirit.

God is at work in all of creation including humanity. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples he'll be with them at the end of time. From the beginning to the end, or rather to a new beginning, God is with us.

And God is constantly inviting humanity to be part of the relationship which Godself enjoys in Trinitarian relationship.

Jesus says we are to make new disciples. The door is not closed to anyone. All are invited to be part of Godly relationship; Trinitarian relationship. We are to invite others; not to smugly enjoy that relationship ourselves.

Richard Rohr's book *Divine Dance*, highlights Trinitarian relationship. He writes how quantum physics and cosmology help us understand the atom and galaxies. He dwells on how reality is radically relational. It is how protons, neutrons and electrons relate to each other that makes an atom.

Similarly for galaxies. Our Milky Way hundreds of billions of stars, enough gas and dust to make billions more stars, and at least ten times as much dark matter as all the stars and gas put together. We call the relationship between them 'gravity'.

Rohr says that power is in the relationships! We have overemphasized the individual qualities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and underplayed the relationship between them.

St. Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity, inspired by the three mysterious strangers who visited Abraham, portrays this relationship quite well.¹ (Genesis 18:1-15) It's probably the best known Trinity image today. Then as now many were confused by or rejected the doctrine of the Trinity.

But Rublev's Trinity reveals a wonderful understanding of God as Three-in-One that goes beyond trying to figure it out. It's an image that continues to draw us into the mysterious, embracing presence of the Trinity.

He paints the three heavenly visitors sitting at a table with a cup between them.

¹ When painted in 1411 for the abbot of the Trinity Monastery in Russia, the initial title was *The Hospitality of Abraham*



Rublev was the first painter to make each angelic figure equal size. Each wears blue clothing; the colour of divinity. Each holds a rod of authority in his left hand. Each face is the same. There is One Lord. Each member of the God-head is equal.

The Father, painted on the left wears a blue tunic underneath a cloak that is light and almost transparent. He is the unseen Creator. He gazes at the other two figures and his head lifted high. With his right hand he gives a blessing to the Son.

The Son is the middle figure. He wears the blue of divinity and also the red-y purple of royal priesthood. He acts as priest to humanity becoming one of us as he does so. He too gives a blessing; to the cup he will drink. His head is bowed towards his Father as he willingly agrees to drink the cup of suffering and sacrifice.

And on the right, the Spirit is depicted. His blue tunic is under a green cloak. Green generally indicates renewal; new life. His hand too rests on the table by the cup. The Son is not alone in sacrifice; the Spirit is with him. His head too is bowed to the Father and also to the Son.

Divine relationship is portrayed in this icon. There is a mutuality expressed in the love, respect, and commitment to each other.

Some have said that the panel on the front of the table had some kind of sticky substance on it. Perhaps it was glue. If it was glue; what fell off the icon? Some say surely it was a mirror.

While the Trinity needs no other; our God extravagantly invites others to join in the fellowship they enjoy together.

Henri Nouwen says:

The more we look at this holy image with the eyes of faith, the more we come to realize that it is painted not as a lovely decoration for a convent church, nor as a helpful explanation of a difficult doctrine, but as a holy place to enter and stay within

Rohr says the relationship is where all the power and meaning are! Perhaps he overstates it. Relationship can't exist without the members. But still the mystery we call God invites us into a dynamic way of being that is all about relationship. We're invited to experience the relationship found within Godself!

How amazing is that!!! No wonder Jesus told us we have to invite others!

Trinity Sunday is the day we celebrate our God – three in one; Father, Son and Holy Spirit – creator, redeemer and life giver. Today we also celebrate who we are in relation to this God. Being named “Holy Trinity” as our church is, makes us very conscious that we are people who believe in the Trinity. Even more importantly we are people who live in relationship with the indefinable, loving Trinitarian God.

Pray: Lord what are you saying to us?

How would you like us to respond?

How would you like us to include others in your life-giving relationship?