



Custom in the Episcopal Church is that the junior-most clergy preaches on Trinity Sunday. *Hmmm.* I looked around and there is no junior clergy here. *Sigh,* guess I will have to preach.

Another custom is that you announce “This is the Sunday when we consider the Trinitarian nature of God. It’s a mystery.” And then you sit down.

Correct but not very helpful, is it? So what to do on this Sunday that considers the nature of God as three-in-one but only-one. We are clearly monotheists even when we talk about God as Trinity. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

Sometimes images help even as they are not complete. Sometimes we say the Trinity is like a 3-leaf clover: three leaves, one stem, one plant. Or perhaps like music: soprano, alto, tenor, bass- each separate and each part of the whole. I thought about calling the Public Radio show “A Way with Words” thinking that they might be able to shed some light on this concept we call the Trinity but I chickened out.

Words just aren’t adequate at times. Think about translating a concept from English into Spanish or French or German- pick a language. We all know that sometimes concepts don’t translate very well, if at all. Words can be barriers between us. As the Bishop mentioned last week, sometimes we need to seek words that the other person can hear- not necessarily the words we would be most comfortable using- but rather words that have a place within the other’s life framework and so my idea can be heard and understood in the other person’s framework. Words can be both barriers and aides to enlightenment.

In the early church, there were huge disputes and many heresies when trying to explain the Trinity- how we can believe in One God when we say God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each attempt to explain the Trinity led to new heresies. The Creeds became one way to explain our faith in God as three-in-one.

We believe in One God, the Father Almighty. ...

We believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord. ...

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of Life. ...

God is each of these and yet one. Where do we go to find God? How is God revealed to us?

Perhaps we call upon the Trinity as a doctrine- a teaching- as one way for us, in our own diversity- to find a way to relate to God. After all, you and I don't always agree on political positions- so why would we necessarily agree on who and what God is? Why would we- with our different life experiences-use the same words to describe God.

Just as our life changes as it goes along, perhaps we need the Trinity because at certain times I feel closer to God as creator, as father – and other times closer to Jesus, as human, as brother, as redeemer- and yet at other times closer to the Holy Spirit, as comforter, advocate, sustainer.

The Trinity is a mystery revealed in scripture even as we know the Trinity in its fullness is beyond human understanding. Chapter 1, verse 7 of Proverbs reads: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Fear in this case is “awe” – a sense of God's majesty and “more-ness.” God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are **both** transcendent meaning “being beyond comprehension” or “being beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge” **and** immanent meaning “indwelling” or “inherent.”¹

The Book of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes are considered wisdom literature. Part of what God, in whatever manifestation you find most comfortable, calls us to is to learn, to reflect and to respond to God. The gaining of wisdom, understanding, and insight in light of who we understand God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be, informs how we act. It informs how we respond morally, ethically and religiously to what happens in our lives.

Some will say that they are spiritual but not religious. And organized religion does have much to answer for- the Crusades, the use of hateful and exclusionary language at times. Organized religion has much to be proud of as well, including the founding and running of many hospitals, care for the orphans and aliens, and building of communities of love and hope.

One critic of the movement of those calling themselves spiritual but not religious, those who shun organized religious, those who say they see and feel God in nature is “so what?” I, too, see God in sunsets and standing atop a mountain- but what does it mean if that is my only experience of God? If my experience of God does not result in my acting differently towards you. At its best, our religion makes our spirituality real. At its best, our faith calls us to action. Yes, Paul writing to the church at Rome said that we are justified by faith alone. That is, our faith in God –Jesus-Holy Spirit- is what makes us right with God. Our works flow as a natural result of that faith.

Abstract ideas such as spirituality need to be tethered to concrete reality. Whether I pray to God or to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit, if there is no change in my daily life and attitudes, then what good is that spirituality or religiosity.

The themes in our readings today are that God's love has been poured out on us through the Holy Spirit. We are, in the words of the Psalmist, little lower than the angels and God is mindful of God's creation.

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/immanent> and transcendent (May 25, 2013).

And the Holy Spirit- Wisdom- calls to us. Understanding raises her voice. Wisdom cries out “To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live” (Proverbs 8:4).

Lady Wisdom, Holy Spirit, breath of God- has been part of God from before the beginning of time, from before creation. And in the words from the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

God, Jesus or Word with a capital “W”, and Holy Spirit- all present, all together- Trinity: three-in-one. All are related and all are community. What we try to create at St. John’s in terms of living together as a community created and maintained in love, mirrors, to a slight degree, what we see and understand of God.

Our hymns today reveal our theology about the Trinity-
Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Or, one of my favorites because it was the hymn sung as hands were laid upon me at my ordination to the priesthood: *Veni Spiritu Sanctus*: Come Holy Spirit.

In ways that we do not fully understand, but sometimes we might feel something, God is each of creator, redeemer and sustainer. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is more than we can say.

In Steven James’ book The Pawn, in an exchange between the protagonist Patrick Bowers and his wife at the end of her life, she tells him that: “our choices decide who we are. Our loves define who we will become.”

God, Jesus, Holy Spirit- love is at the core of relationship. Love is at the core of God’s call to us and our response to God.

If you get the chance, visit the Great Smoky Mountains. You can stand on a ridge top and look out over miles and miles of rolling and forested mountains. At the farthest edge of your vision, there is mist that makes the distance indistinct. You *know* that the mountains are there- but you can’t quite see them with clarity. Apparently the word “Appalachian” is from a Native American word meaning “endless mountains.” And if you’re lucky, a light breeze will waft over you as you stand on that ridge top. The distance and the mist give you pause as you consider God the creator: known and unknown. The breeze reminds you of how often the Holy Spirit is breath or wind. And if you’re like me, the time in the wilderness is a time for redemption and rebirth- a pause from all the pressures of the world. Jesus, the redeemer.

Someone once said that we need three things in life: Something to do, someone to love, and something to hope for. And that the ability to hope is evidence for God. Creator, redeemer, sustainer. God with us, now and forever. **Amen.**