

Building Relationship with our Triune God

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek
Trinity Sunday, Year B
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Today is Trinity Sunday, as it always is on the Sunday after Pentecost. Today we remember and celebrate not a saint, but a doctrine – the doctrine of the Trinity.

There are many possible approaches to a sermon on Trinity Sunday. I could talk about the Council of Nicaea which met in 325 and all the heresies and arguments that were swirling for two or three centuries as the church tried to work out a way to articulate their belief in God as well as their beliefs about God. I could read to you the Athanasian Creed which emphasizes the triune nature of God and the incarnation. If you are interested, you can find it in the Book of Common Prayer on page 864. But I'm afraid if I read it to you, you have a hard time staying awake.

So, I've decided to try a different approach. Instead of a historical or even theological lesson on the Trinity, I'd like to talk about how we understand God. Through the Trinity we see God in relationship.

The word Trinity comes from the Latin *tri*, as in tricycle, which means "three," and the word *unitas*, as in united, which means "unity." So, Trinity means, "three-fold unity."

In American Sign Language, the ASL sign for Trinity is, "3 in 1."¹ The 3 we are referring to are, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

¹ <https://www.signingsavvy.com/sign/TRINITY/7598/1>

We believe in God the father, the Almighty. The one who created the heavens and the earth.

We believe in Jesus Christ whom we refer to as the Son of God. He was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the 3rd day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the father. He is also known as the Redeemer.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, the power, life or energy of God by which we are sustained, inspired and given the opportunity to be connected with the wholeness of God who gives us life.

These three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are one.

Why is this important and why should we bother to confess our faith and struggle to be in relationship with this Trinitarian God of ours? God gave us life and lets us be, but if we don't work to form a relationship with God, we will miss the opportunity to live in the fullness of all that God calls us to be.

This morning's gospel lesson includes the beautiful and probably the most popular quote from the New Testament. *"For God so loved the world he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life."* And I like the next verse, too, *"Indeed, God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

But, before we got to that part, we heard a story about a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Under the cover of darkness one night, Nicodemus came to Jesus

and said to him *“Rabbi we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”*

He had come to speak with Jesus. Having recognized the power of God that was within him, Nicodemus wanted to learn more.

Jesus’s response was a puzzling one. Jesus answered him, *“very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”*

Nicodemus was confused as he took Jesus’ words literally. He asked how can anyone be born after having grown old? Jesus’s response didn’t help the confusion very much. He answered, *“very truly I tell you no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit... You must be born from above.”*

Poor Nicodemus! None of this made much sense to him though he was a leader and a teacher of the Law.

Jesus went on, *“the wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the spirit.”*

Finally, Nicodemus says to Jesus, *“how can these things be?”* And Jesus answers, *“are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”*

Jesus is pointing out to Nicodemus that he doesn’t really know as much as he thinks he does. Jesus is inviting Nicodemus to move, step out into a new understanding. Nicodemus needs to open himself to new ideas and new possibilities, new ways of understanding how to be in relationship with God. He needs to listen, and he has a lot to learn. And so do we.

This reminds me of a paragraph we read in our Wednesday morning Bible study this week. In his book, We Make The Road By Walking, Brian McLaren said,

“The wind can be blowing, but if your sail isn’t raised, you will not go far. You can be surrounded by oxygen, but if you don’t breathe, it won’t do you any good. The sap can be flowing, but if a branch isn’t connected to the vine, it will wither. If you don’t have kindling and wood in your hearth, a lit match won’t burn very long. It’s the same with the spirit. We are surrounded with the aliveness of the spirit. All that remains is for us to learn how to let the spirit fill, flow and glow within us.”²

The Pharisees were deeply religious people. They loved the Law because they understood that by fulfilling it, they could please God. The problem was, no one could ever fully and completely live within the Law. So, God came as the Son, which is also God, to teach us new ways to be in relationship. Now, through the spirit, which is also God, we are all offered the opportunity to learn and to grow; the chance to be in a close deep and abiding relationship with this amazing, ever present, everywhere at once, God who created us, redeems us and sustains us.

Jesus came because God loves the world, and the people of the world, then and now, you and me, all of us, everyone. With all our faults, though we usually misunderstand and can’t comprehend what is right in front of us,

² McLaren, B. (2014). *We make the road by walking*. New York: Jericho Books, p.207.

mysteriously, God loves the world. And, as New Testament Scholar, John Meier says, “When God loves, things happen.”

Are you still awake. Good! Here are a few things I hope you’ll take away from today’s sermon.

1. Alive is not enough. We are called to more! When we build a strong relationship with God, we will find that we can be and do so much more.
2. Here are some ideas of how we can we go about building up our relationship with our Triune God.

We need to open our eyes and realize that God the Father created us and all of the amazing beauty around us.

We need to humble ourselves and accept that God the Son came to show us the way so that we can be saved.

And we need to recognize the movement of the Spirit all around us and realize that it is we who must hoist the sails, take each breath, connect to the vine, and fill our hearts with kindling and wood so that we can draw into ourselves this spirit which surrounds us with the energy and aliveness of God.

3. Finally, walk away today knowing that God is one. And, because God is One, then that One God is the God of everyone. So, treat everyone with respect and kindness knowing we are all God's beloved children.

May God bless us all! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.