

THE TRINITY
Matthew 28:16-20
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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"I believe in God the Father Almighty...and in Jesus Christ His only Son Our Lord... I believe in the Holy Ghost."

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost."

These liturgical expressions contain the formula that is the foundation of our Christian faith: the trinity or three persons in one God. The trinity is the uniquely Christian answer to the question, *"Who is God?"*

This is Trinity Sunday, a day set aside on the church calendar for us to celebrate and contemplate the mystery of our Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

St. Augustine, while puzzling over the Trinity, was walking along the beach one day when he saw a young boy with a bucket running back and forth pouring water in a little hole. Augustine asked, "What are you doing?" The boy replied, "I'm trying to put that ocean into this hole." Right then and there Augustine realized that he was trying to put the infinite God into his finite mind.

You get the picture? The Trinity is ultimately beyond our comprehension.

But when you think about it doesn't that make sense?

Still, we can say with assurance the only true God reveals himself to us through the Bible in three different ways:

The Father who created us,
The Son who saved us, and
The Sustainer who carries us through life.

So where do we begin as we try our best, with all our limitations, to make sense of this mind boggling doctrine that enforces our Christian faith?

Maybe this second formula will help.

The Father is the Awesome One;
The Son is the Intimate One and;
The Holy Spirit is the Empowering One;

keeping in mind all along that all three are all three at the same time.

Let's begin with the Awesome One, God the Father. One of our praise songs is called "Our God is An Awesome God," in other words whenever you really sense you are in God's presence you become overwhelmed, frozen in your tracks, speechless and doubled over with the realization God is holy and you are not. You are a sinner surrounded by sinners. You are stripped bare of pretense, your mask is ripped off and you are forced to see yourself as you really are, causing you to be afraid.

I think there are two types of fear: a fear of God and a fear of evil. A healthy fear of God simply means you are absolutely overwhelmed by God's great and majestic presence. The other fear, the fear of evil, means that you're afraid of being dehumanized and destroyed forever.

Unfortunately, I think too often we confuse the two. Even a child who grows up in a loving home and has well intentioned Sunday school teachers can end up being afraid of God.

I know this is true because as a child I was afraid of God. In my Sunday School class the Nuns taught,

"If you miss mass on Sunday, if you eat meat on Friday, if you receive communion with a mortal sin on your soul, that's another mortal sin on your soul."

By the way, I was taught, "if you die with a mortal sin on your soul God will send you to hell." You can imagine that as a fifth grader I was afraid I might have a mortal sin on my soul, so I went to confession every Saturday afternoon looking both ways before I crossed the street.

What I'm about to tell you is completely true. On a Saturday afternoon, I was 9 or 10 years old, I went into the confessional booth. Father Raymond Hutner, a retired army chaplain, opened the small screen and said, "Begin." I said, "Bless me Father for I have sinned, it's been one week since my last confession. The following are the sins I've committed.

I picked a fight with my brother,

I took 5 cookies when my mother said to take only three,

I committed adultery...."

I could see through the screen Father Hutner bolt up with a start.

"You committed what?" "I committed adultery."

"Who told you about adultery?"

"Well, the nun said..." "How many times do I have to tell you kids, pay no attention to those women? Now get out of here and don't come back until you've really done something wrong, then I'll forgive you."

Looking back I believe that moment in the confessional booth was a turning point. I began to question my perception of God being a mean old man watching me, now I could think, maybe God was more like Father Hutner. "Don't come back here unless you've really done something wrong, then I'll forgive you." That gruff old saint modeled Christ's love and grace for me.

Which bring us to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, the Son, the Intimate One. Because God is so holy, awesome and high above us He made the decision to come down to our level. Do you remember when you were little when you met an adult for the first time how intimidating it was to have this big towering adult looking down at you while you were craning your neck to look up and make eye contact? But every once in a while a sensitive adult would bend or kneel, coming down to your level, eye to eye and smile to smile. That's what God does to us through Jesus. God comes down to our level. Jesus makes God accessible and through Jesus we experience intimacy, in a warm loving relationship. Jesus gives us the gift of friendship and makes love possible.

This is wonderfully illustrated in Soren Kirkegaard's parable of the King and the peasant girl. While riding out in the country side, a rich and powerful king saw a beautiful peasant girl working in the fields. Instantly, he fell in love with her. Back in his palace, he wondered, "How can I let this beautiful young woman know how much I love her? Shall I send my servants to her house, bring her back here and ask her to be my wife and queen? But how will I know if she really loves me as much as I love her" Will she consent to be my wife because she's too afraid to say "no" to her king or will she say "yes," not out of love, but only to seek wealth and power?" Then the King had an idea. Instead of bringing the young lady to his palace and making her his queen, he would go down to her level and meet her where she lived.

So he made the decision to give up his crown become a peasant himself and go live in her village hoping they would meet and she would love him as much as he loved her. The King gave

everything up, his throne, his wealth, his power in order to make love possible. When God became one of us, Jesus God gave up his awesome power in order to make intimacy possible. Yes, God remains awesome, our's is an awesome God, but in and through Jesus we are introduced to God's awesome love and it's that gift of intimacy that rounds out our humanity and makes us complete.

Finally, we come to the Holy Spirit, the one who sustains and carries us through life. God sends his Holy Spirit to empower and comfort us. The Spirit is our guide and friend surrounding us like the air we breathe. Last week on Pentecost Sunday we celebrated God's gift of His Spirit. Like a mighty wind or a gentle breeze the Spirit moves in and around us bringing life. The Spirit of God is the presence of God and that Spirit is with us always through thick and thin helping us day by day to live with conviction, joy and love. The Spirit empowers us to do what needs to be done, especially when everything goes terribly wrong.

I don't remember all the details but I remember hearing about a young man competing in a marathon. He was nearing the end of the race when he tore a ligament, stumbled and fell down writhing in pain. Out of nowhere a stranger stepped forward from the crowd, picked up the young runner and carried him to the finish line. He didn't win, but he finished the race. That's what the Holy Spirit does for us. You're never guaranteed you'll always win. God doesn't promise you'll never experience heartache and hard times, but God does promise to empower and guide you through the ups and downs, your victories and defeats. God will sustain you, and never leave you. You will always be empowered to always finish.

In the Upper Room Jesus said many things. Here are a few verses lifted from John 14: *“And I will pray the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever even the Spirit of Truth. You know him, for he dwells with you and in you. In that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.”*

Jesus is saying we are invited and encouraged to enter into this dynamic, loving and intimate relationship of the Trinity, underscoring the fact that our Christian faith is not simply based on a list of rules and regulations, do's and don'ts, but is indeed based on your relationships, first with God, then each other, and finally yourself.

And it's this invitation that makes the Doctrine of the trinity a dynamic, life-giving reality. So next time you hear or sing the formula Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Gloria Patri, or the Doxology, during a Creed or a baptism, always remember this: Our awesome, intimate, empowering God invites you to be in an awesome, intimate, empowering friendship with him so you can become an awesome, intimate, empowering child of God. Accept the invitation. God is waiting for you to enter his eternal mystery so he can bless you with all the graces of the Kingdom.