

Sermon for Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico
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Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Canticle 13
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15

Do you believe in magic?

That was one of my favorite songs back away in High School.
– from 1965 by The Lovin’ Spoonful.

I love magic. I can’t do it, but I like to see it done.
It’s an illusion. It’s not real.

What I believe in is mystery. That’s what today is all about: mystery.

Let me define mystery for you a little differently.
I love reading mysteries, especially British who dunnits?
but those are mysteries that beg to be solved.

The Mystery I’m talking about with the Trinity
is a mystery that is not to be solved – only pondered.

Mysteries are like Zen Koans – what is the sound of one hand clapping.
Or the mysteries contained in the Parables of Jesus –
the kingdom of God
Is like

- a merchant in search of fine pearls;
- a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again;
- a net that was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind;

It's Trinity Sunday, and it's all about the mystery of who God is rather than what God does.

If you look in the Outline of Faith in the back of the Prayer book:

Q. What is the Trinity?

A. The Trinity is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So we have to look earlier under God the Father

Q. What do we learn about God as creator from the revelation to Israel?

A. We learn that there is one God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

It goes on a bit from there.

So we look under God the Son:

Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is the only Son of God?

A. We mean that Jesus is the only perfect image of the Father, and shows us the nature of God.

A. What is the nature of God revealed in Jesus?

Q. God is love.

It goes on a bit from there.

So finally we look under The Holy Spirit:

Q. Who is the Holy Spirit?

A. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, God at work in the world and in the Church even now.

And it goes on a bit as well.

Growing up, I never thought much about the concept of the Trinity.

I just figured it was like water existing in three forms:

a solid, a liquid, a gas; ice, water, steam.

I do remember being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

After watching my baptism service, my sister, she was about four or five, wanted to baptize her doll.

She took her doll into the playground where Dad had dug a hole for some unremembered purpose.

Kathy pulled over the garden hose, and filled the hole with water.

She picked up her doll, held her out above the hole, and pronounced:

“I baptize you in the name of the father and the son,
and into the hole you go.”

That’s not quite what the church had in mind.

The Trinity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – became doctrine starting in 325 AD at the Council of Nicaea.

The Emperor Constantine called the second Council of the Church in an effort to define what it meant to be a Christian.

You see, back then there was no ONE church,
no matter what some would have us believe.

There were many forms of Christianity.

If we traveled from one church to another,
we might not recognize them as worshipping the same faith.

Anyway, Constantine wanted to define what it meant to be a Christian. He had made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire, but Romans were fastidious and needed to know who was and who wasn’t Christian.

Among the issues the bishops and theologians were dealing with:

- trying to figure out how Jesus Christ could be fully human and fully divine,
- how Christ could be at once separate and united with the Father,
- and how the Father and Son could be separate but united with the Holy Spirit.

This is not easy stuff. And Nicaea was not the end of the discussion.

The divinity of the Holy Spirit wasn't defined until the First Council of Constantinople in 381, where the Nicene Creed was revised.

The Council of Ephesus in 431 declared the Virgin Mary as the *Theotokos* – “God Bearer” or “Mother of God.”

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 defined the two natures of Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine.

There were several other church councils, but those are the big four.

Would it surprise you to know,
the word for Trinity does not appear in the Scriptures.

What the Scriptures do insist on is that there is ONE God.

So with a Trinity: Are we saying there are three Gods?

So how did they meld the three together into one?
How does $1+1+1=1$?

That's a toughie. The suggestion that provided the answer for the first gathering of all the bishops of the church came from Constantine himself.

The Emperor suggested the use of the term *Homoousios*,
Spelled H-O-M-O-O-U-S-I-O-S
which meant that the three were of **one substance or essence**
rather than using the term *Homoiousios*,
Spelled H-O-M-O-I-O-U-S-I-O-S
which would have indicated that they were of similar substance.

That's a big difference based on a single letter in the Greek alphabet,
but it was enough to convince the majority of the Bishops present.

That kind of makes sense with my water analogy – ice, water, steam.
An even more convincing image is mercury.

Did you every break a thermometer?

You see all those little balls of mercury scooting around.
They all seem to be separate, and they do just fine on their own.
But when they those little silvery balls touch each other, smoosh –
they all become one: separate and then the same.

So given the Emperor's nod, the bishops developed wording that defined
the three as one and one in three.

Many Christians, if not most, probably don't think about the Trinity much.

From a Scriptural standpoint:

In the Old Testament:

We have God the creator and emancipator and King.

And we have the Spirit who moved over the waters.

In the New Testament:

We have God the Father to whom the Son prayed.

We have the Son, who Thomas declared "my Lord and my God."

We have the Son, who God the Father raised from the dead.

And we have the Spirit sent to teach and comfort after the Ascension.

These are all the same and yet different.

How does one understand the Trinity?

I'm reminded of the lines from Alice in Wonderland

"Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said.

'One can't believe impossible things.'

I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen.

'When I was your age,

I always did it for half-an-hour a day.

**Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible
things before breakfast."**

It's like the Creed that Constantine and the Bishops came up with.

It's a workable definition of Christianity and God for us as Christians.

Not everyone agrees with every word and line.

There are those of us who cross their fingers during certain parts.

One of my spiritual mentors made me alright with it when he told me:

“People smarter than I am have worked through the Creed. Other folks have been fine with the Creed for 2000 years. I may not buy into all of it, but who am I to quibble.”

Of course, that wasn't good enough for everyone. There were those who wanted to lock down not only the words, but also the meaning.

They wanted to define what we thought as well as what we said. So we have in the historical documents in the back of the Prayer Book a thing called The Creed of Athanasius.

Yes, the same Athanasius – the saint for whom the chapel is named, and the Patron Saint of Trinity on the Hill.

We see some of that around the Christian church today. We see people arguing over not only the words, but the meanings of the words, and not only the words that are said, but what people are thinking when they say the words.

So what's the Trinity for us? A mystery. If we descend into the realm of the thought police, we can retreat to the Creed of Athanasius.

Just for this special day,
we'll be saying the Athanasian Creed
in place of the Creed from Nicaea.

So this being Trinity Sunday, let us pray:

Trinity of love, deposing the powers of hate and isolation;
gathering creation in bonds of mutual care:
through the waters of baptism may our relatedness be reborn
in justice, mercy and peace;
through Jesus Christ, who was and is and is to come.

Amen.