

HOLY TRINITY SUNDAY

JULY 12, 2022

JOHN 16:12-15

I READ THIS WEEK THAT IF YOU TALK ABOUT THE TRINITY FOR MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES, YOU WILL INEVITABLY FALL INTO HERESY. SO, I HAVE TWO OPTIONS THIS WEEK AS WE CELEBRATE TRINITY SUNDAY. FIRST, I COULD PREACH AN INCREDIBLY SHORT SERMON, (WHICH I'M SURE MANY OF YOU WOULD APPLAUD), OR I COULD FALL INTO THE TRAP OF BEING A HERETIC.

KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR WATCH AND WE'LL SEE WHERE I FALL.

LET'S BEGIN WITH THE OBVIOUS – THERE ARE THREE PARTS OF THE TRINITY WHOM WE CALL THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT. THEY ARE ALSO REFERRED TO AS CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND SUSTAINER.

THESE PARTS OF THE TRINITY ARE DISTINCT FROM EACH OTHER. YOU MAY HAVE SEEN THE MEDIEVAL PAINTING OF THE OLD GUY, THE YOUNG GUY AND THE DOVE. THE TRINITY. BUT IF WE WORSHIP THE TRINITY AS THREE DISTINCT GODS, THAT'S POLYTHEISM. AND THERE YOU HAVE IT – TWO MINUTES IN AND WE HAVE HERESY.

SO THE TRINITY IS NOT REALLY THREE DIFFERENT GODS. GOD THE CREATOR, GOD INCARNATE AS CHRIST, AND GOD THE SPIRIT ARE ONE AND THE SAME GOD. THEREFORE, WE COULD SAY FOR EXAMPLE, THAT GOD THE CREATOR WAS BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY – WHICH MAKES HER THE MOTHER OF GOD. THIS IS CALLED MODALISM – WHICH BELIEVES THAT GOD IS ONE PERSON WHO HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN THREE FORMS OR MODES AND THAT GOD THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT DO NOT EXIST AT THE SAME TIME BUT MANIFESTS HIMSELF IN THESE THREE FORMS AT DIFFERENT TIMES. AND YEP – IT'S A HERESY AS WELL.

GOD THE CREATOR WAS NOT BORN OF A VIRGIN. GOD THE CREATOR EXISTS ETERNALLY AND HAS CREATED ALL THAT WAS, ALL THAT IS, AND ALL THAT WILL BE. SO GOD EMBODIED IN JESUS AND GOD AS HOLY SPIRIT MUST COME FROM THE CREATOR GOD AND SERVE THE ULTIMATE WILL OF THE CREATOR. WRONG – THIS IS ALSO HERESY, KNOWN AS SUBORDINATIONISM WHICH SAYS THAT GOD THE SON AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE SUBORDINATE IN NOT ONLY RELATIONSHIP, BUT NATURE AND BEING AS WELL.

AND USING ANALOGIES IS JUST AS TRICKY. TRINITY IS LIKE WATER – THREE FORMS WATER, ICE AND VAPOR. THAT’S ALSO HERESY CALLED MORTALISM WHICH SAYS GOD IS NOT THREE DISTINCT PERSONS, BUT MERELY REVEALS HIMSELF IN THREE DIFFERENT FORMS.

OR SAYING THE TRINITY IS LIKE THE SUN IN THE SKY WHERE YOU HAVE THE STAR AND THE LIGHT AND THE HEAT. THIS IS ALSO HERESY CALLED ARIANISM WHICH SAYS THAT CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT ARE CREATIONS OF THE FATHER, AND NOT ONE IN NATURE WITH HIM. IT’S A BAD ANALOGY.

OR SAYING THE TRINITY IS LIKE A THREE LEAF CLOVER – HERESY AGAIN – KNOWN AS PARTIALISM, WHICH STATES THAT THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE NOT DISTINCT PERSONS OF THE GODHEAD, BUT ARE PARTS OF GOD, EACH COMPOSING ONE THIRD OF THE DIVINE.

HOW AM I DOING SO FAR? HOW MANY HERESIES IS THAT? AND HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN PREACHING?

THE REAL TRUTH OF WHAT WE CELEBRATE TODAY IS THAT THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE THREE PERSONS OF ONE SUBSTANCE, COEQUAL AND COETERNAL IN NATURE. WE CAN LEARN IT AND RECITE IT – THREE PERSONS OF ONE SUBSTANCE, BUT THESE TERMS DON’T REALLY HELP ME UNDERSTAND THE TRINITY.

THE TRI-UNITY OF GOD IS A PARADOX. A PARADOX IS HOLDING TWO SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY THINGS AT ONCE. EVEN THE WORD TRI-UNE IS PARADOXICAL. THREE YET ONE, ONE YET THREE.

WE CHRISTIANS REVEL IN PARADOX. GOD IS THREE AND ONE. JESUS CHRIST IS TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN ALL AT THE SAME TIME. A JUSTIFIED BELIEVER IS BOTH SAINT AND SINNER. IT’S ALL PARQADOX. IN A WORLD THAT DEMANDS BLACK AND WHITE, NEAT AND TIDY, EITHER/OR ANSWERS, CHRISTIANITY COMES WITH A BOTH/AND.

THERE IS A STORY ABOUT THE GREAT THEOLOGIAN, SAINT AUGUSTIAN. ONE DAY AFTER HE HAD BEEN WRITING ABOUT THE TRINITY FOR AWHILE, HE TOOK A BREAK TO WALK ALONG THE BEACH. HE CAME ACROSS A BOY WHO HAD A BUCKET WHICH HE WOULD FILL UP, RUN UP THE HILL AND DUMP THE WATER INTO THE SAND. HE DID THIS OVER AND OVER UNTIL

FINALLY AUGUSTINE STOPPED HIM AND ASKED THE BOY WHAT HE WAS DOING. THE BOY SAID, "I AM DRAINING THE SEA INTO THE SAND." AUGUSTINE POINTED OUT THE FUTILITY OF THE TASK AND THE BOY REPLIED, "YES, BUT I WILL DRAIN THE SEA BEFORE YOU UNDERSTAND THE TRINITY." IF AUGUSTINE COULDN'T FIGURE IT OUT, WE'RE NOT EITHER.

THE THREE ARE ONE. THE ONE IS THREE. IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY HUMAN SENSE, AND YET TODAY, CHRISTIANS AROUND THE WORLD ARE GATHERED TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE AND SING PRAISES TO GOD THE HOLY TRINITY. LET'S BE HONEST. IF WE WERE INVENTING A GOD AND A RELIGION, WE WOULDN'T GO THIS WAY. WE'D KEEP THINGS SIMPLE AND STRAIGHTFORWARD. RELIGION IS HARD ENOUGH TO MARKET IN A SECULAR WORLD. WHY MAKE THINGS MORE DIFFICULT THAN THEY HAVE TO BE? THE TROUBLE WITH THAT IS WE DON'T MAKE UP OUR IDEAS OF GOD. GOD TELLS US WHO HE IS THROUGH HIS WORD.

IT'S INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT TRINITY SUNDAY IS THE ONLY SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH CALENDAR THAT IS BASED ON A DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH. IT'S NOT AN EVENT LIKE CHRISTMAS OR EASTER OR PENTECOST. ON THIS SUNDAY, AND THIS SUNDAY ALONE, WE CELEBRATE A MAIN DOCTRINE OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH.

AND THIS PARTICULAR DOCTRINE IS NOT CLEAR. IT'S NOT EASY. IT'S NOT COMFORTABLE. BUT RELATING TO GOD AS TRINITY IS AN EXPERIENCE THAT GETS US AS CLOSE TO THE TRUTH OF GOD AS WE DARE GO.

THE POINT OF THE TRINITY IS NOT TO SEPARATE OUT AND DEFINE THE PARTS. BUT TO OPEN UP TO US ONE WAY – THE PRIMARY WAY – TO UNDERSTAND THE VASTNESS OF GOD. YES, GOD IS THE ALMIGHTY CREATOR WHO SPOKE THE WORLD INTO BEING. YES, GOD IS INCARNATE IN JESUS CHRIST, WHO FULLY EMBODIES THE EXTENT OF DIVINE LOVE FOR THE WORLD. YES, GOD IS PRESENT WITH US TODAY AS HOLY SPIRIT, WHO GUIDES AND COMFORTS AND ENLIVENS US. THE REASON WE CELEBRATE THIS DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY IS TO KEEP US FROM NARROWING OUR VISION OF WHO GOD IS AND WHAT GOD DOES, AND TO BROADEN OUR UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE LOVE AND WORK OF GOD IN THE WORLD.

I DON'T OFTEN SHOW OFF BY THROWING GREEK WORDS AROUND, BUT HERE'S ONE WORTH LEARNING. THIS WORD DESCRIBES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THREE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY. THE TERM IS *PERICHORESIS*.

THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT RELATE BY MEANS OF *PERICHORESIS*. LIKE A LOT OF GREEK WORDS, THIS ONE IS INTERESTING TO EXPLAIN. THERE IS NO ENGLISH WORD TO USE AS A DIRECT TRANSLATION. BUT IT SUGGESTS THE MUTUAL INDWELLING OF THE TRINITY. THE IDEA IS THAT ALL THREE ARE EQUAL AND THEIR IDENTITIES ARE BASED IN EACH OTHER.

IT'S NOT A STATIC RELATIONSHIP – IF YOU NOTICE THE WORD PERICHORESIS HAS THE SAME ROOT AS CHOREOGRAPHY. THERE IS AN INWARD AND OUTWARD MOVEMENT INVOLVED IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE TRINITY. IT'S THE DANCE OF THE DIVINE LIFE. TO THINK OF THE TRINITY IN THIS WAY MEANS THAT RELATIONSHIP IS AT THE HEART OF THE IDENTITY OF GOD. RELATIONSHIP IS WHO GOD IS.

AND HERE'S THE BEAUTY OF ALL THIS – IF GOD IS RELATIONSHIP, THAT MEANS WE ARE TOO, AS WE ARE DRAWN INTO THE DIVINE DANCE. AND OUR NEIGHBORS ARE DRAWN IN. AND ALL THOSE WHO LOVE US. AND YES, EVEN ALL THOSE WHO DON'T. SEE, GOD EXISTS, FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME, IN AND FOR RELATIONSHIP. AND SINCE YOU AND I ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE, WE ARE MADE TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP TOO. MADE TO BE CONNECTED TO THE PEOPLE AND THE WORLD AROUND US.

SO, HERE'S YOUR TAKEAWAY: IF GOD IS A TRINITY OF PERSONS, AND “THE WHOLE PURPOSE FOR WHICH WE EXIST IS TO BE “ TAKEN INTO THE LIFE OF GOD,” THEN OUR LIVES MUST BE A DANCE. WHEN THE WORLD SAYS FREEDOM IS EACH INDIVIDUAL SELF EXERTING ITS INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY, THE CHURCH SAYS REAL LIFE ISN'T SELF-FOCUSED, IT'S OTHER-FOCUSED. TOM KELLER SAYS THE DANCE IS “WHEN WE DELIGHT AND SERVE SOMEONE ELSE, WE ENTER INTO A DYNAMIC ORBIT AROUND HIM OR HER, WE CENTER ON THE INTERESTS AND DESIRES OF THE OTHER” — THAT'S WHERE TRUE JOYS ARE TO BE FOUND. TRINITARIAN LIFE *JUST IS* MUTUALLY SELF-GIVING LOVE; IT *JUST IS* COFFEE HOUR (HARD AS THAT IS FOR AN INTROVERT TO SAY); TRINITARIAN LIFE *JUST IS* OPENING YOUR HOMES TO SHARE YOUR HEARTHS AND SHARE YOUR HEARTS WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS; TRINITARIAN LIFE *JUST IS* PROVISION FOR THE POOR, IT'S COLORING ON THE FLOOR WITH A CHILD, SITTING BY A HOSPITAL BED, HONORING THE DIGNITY OF EVERY HUMAN BEING MADE IN THE IMAGE OF OUR TRIUNE GOD.

THE TRINITY IS NOT A DOCTRINE TO BE ARGUED, IT IS NOT EVEN A CONCEPT TO BE UNDERSTOOD, BUT RATHER THE TRINITY IS A MYSTERY INTO WHICH WE ARE INVITED. A DANCE INTO WHICH WE ARE CALLED TO JOIN. IN THE WONDER OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.