

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

*The Trinitarian Formula*

This week we celebrate Trinity Sunday. Churches have been having Trinity Sunday for a very long time. In the Bible we find God as the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the nature of God. If we want to worship God as he is, then we worship him as the trine God, because that is who he is. People often say that all religions worship the same God. That notion is appealing, and it stems from the thought that there is a single person God. Different religions just have a different name for the same God. Makes sense. We have different names, right? Our “real’ name may be Stuart. Our granddad started calling us Peanut and so most of the family stills calls us that. Our bowling team calls us Ten Pin. We’re leaving at get-together and leave our coat on the chair. One person yells “Stuart!”, another “Peanut!”, and a third shouts “Hey Ten Pin!” They call different names, but they are all calling the same person. People apply this idea to God. Everyone is just calling God by different names – Jehovah, Vishnu, Yahweh, Allah, and so forth. But that approach falls apart when God reveals himself as the triune God. With the triune God you have three persons. When you have three persons, you need three names. But you also must hold in tension that the three persons actually only comprise one God! With this in mind, it becomes glaringly obvious the Christian faith does not share its God with any other religion or belief I know.

So in our Christian faith the three most common names for the three persons in the triune God are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These names are used when important things are taking place. We use them to place our worship under the name of God. We use them at baptisms. I connect them with the words of forgiveness and absolution in the confession. They are also used when blessings and dedications are performed. When we bring in a new piece of furniture, cross, candles, banners, communion ware and items used in worship we dedicate them with the triune name of God. If you are sick and I visit you, I will probably ask God’s healing for you and bless you with the triune name. If I come to your house and bless your antique doll or tool collection, it will be blessed with the three-fold name of God. These are ways we use the Trinity in our sacred rituals.

## *The Trinity in the Bible*

People have all sorts of ideas about the Trinity. Some say its made-up. Some say with the Trinity there are actually three gods. The knowledge that God is three in one comes from the Bible. Many claim the Trinity comes from old pagan religious beliefs, philosophy, or something like that. I'm not going to get into fine detail here this morning but there are a few spots in the Scriptures that highlight what I'm talking about. The first place is during creation where in Genesis chapter one God says,

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Genesis 1:26**

Key words in this passage include the "us" and "our." When we say "us or "our" the situation has more than one person. So here in the opening pages of the Bible, in Genesis, it makes it clear God is more than one person. We see this in greater relief when we consider these two passages;

**"I and the Father are one." John 10:30**

**"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46**

First Jesus asserts the unity of himself and God the Father. In the second verse, Jesus is crying out from the cross to the Father. On the cross we find Jesus as one divine person calling to another divine person, making it abundantly clear there is more than one person in the Godhead.

Now on to the Holy Spirit. Even though the Holy Spirit has infinitely more power than an infinite number of hurricanes, he doesn't bring attention to himself. If it were not for Jesus, we would know practically nothing about the Spirit. Jesus speaks a little about the Spirit, as in today's gospel text, where Jesus says the Spirit is like a wind. It's an invisible power that you can't measure or put in a box, and it is always on the move. On Pentecost Sunday last week Jesus spoke very clearly about the Spirit. He said,

**When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, ... John 16:13**

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "he." He identifies the Spirit not as an impersonal force like the wind or electricity or an explosion. In that case Jesus would have said, "It will guide you ..." He identifies the Spirit as a person – "he." "He will guide you ..."

Those three examples point to why the Christian church got the notion to hold to the position that God's nature is a three-in-one Trinity. But let's look at just one more Bible

passage that Jesus gives to help us. I think of this passage as a kind of Trinity-for-dummies verse. Here it is;

**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ... Matthew 28:19**

Right from the lips of Jesus we hear the threefold name of God given to the church to use for baptisms and many other times of blessing.

### *How We Handle Knowledge of the Trinity*

So God is a trinity, a three person/ one God divine being. What now? This is where a little caution can go a long way. God does not task us with the job of understanding the Trinity. That would be a fool's errand. It would be like trying to understand eternity. This side of heaven we just don't have the capacity to grasp such things. Neither is it given to us to explain it. If we start describing to someone a divine being who is three persons but still only one being people might call 911 and they would ship us off to the funny farm. God does not reveal himself as the three-in-one so we can spend our days exploring this lofty revelation trying to unravel its mysteries. That would be a total waste of time. Yet there are those who would relish the opportunity to do so. This is all infinitely and completely beyond our comprehension. Consequently, people typically have three reactions to the church's teaching on the Trinity. First, they reject it. Second, they say it is not important for our faith life – all you need is Jesus. Third, they let the divine mystery stand unchallenged and they simply worship God as he reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The third camp is where we all want to be. We accept the Scriptures teaching on the nature of God. We affirm it in our confessions of the Christian faith. Thirdly, we reject all other descriptions of the supreme divine being - and they are legion, they are many.

### *The Trinity for Our Everyday Lives*

Up to this point in the sermon I have pointed out how the Christian church has faithfully kept its unique faith in the triune God and defended the Trinity against false notions, ideas and teachings about God. We also took a quick look at some of the places in the Bible where we find the Trinity and the dangers of trying to get too speculative about God who is three persons yet still one God. How does this all flow down into our everyday lives? Thinking of God as Trinity gives us a simple and complete plan of our salvation. Let's see how that works.

We know that God the Father is the source of all goodness and justice. This goodness and justice are required of all creation, including us. Are we good and just? Sometimes. Sometimes not. When we're on our way to help at the soup kitchen, someone pulls out in front of us. As we slam on the brakes, we use our middle finger to let the perpetrator know that in our book she's number one. We do good. We do evil. Just one drop of poison in a pot of soup ruins the whole batch. We get one splotch of spaghetti sauce on our clean white shirt and we aren't going to the party until we change shirts. So we stand condemned before the judgement seat of God and are under the curse of death because while we have done good, the evil we do renders the whole garment unclean.

While the Father is the source and standard of all goodness and justice, Jesus took on our human nature and then lived a life in perfect accordance with justice and goodness. Jesus lived the life that we were meant to live but did not, and do not.

The Father is the source of goodness. Jesus' life was perfectly good. Now the Holy Spirit makes us the good people of God. We have no hope of ever justifying ourselves before God as good when our thoughts, words, and deeds are compared to his holy standards. No matter how hard we try to live a righteous and moral life, we cannot help but fail. No matter how hard we try to understand God and things like the Trinity, we can't. No matter how much we seek to draw near to God through prayer and contemplation, we will never know the presence of God in our lives unless HE draws near to us. Left to ourselves we are hopelessly lost. It's the work of the Holy Spirit to convict us that we are lost, to give us faith in God's promise of grace and forgiveness and salvation, and to credit the perfectly good life Jesus lived as our very own. The Holy Spirit makes us completely good in the eyes of the Father, and so we have the hope of everlasting life with God. In our baptism we were clothed with the likeness of Jesus Christ. In the Holy Supper the blood of Jesus the lamb of God cleanses us from all sin.

Is holding to God as the Trinity necessary? It's critical. Is the Trinity Biblical? Completely. Is it understandable? No, but is it relevant to our everyday lives? Nothing could be more practical, helpful, spiritual and true as we seek to find our place with God and enjoy a meaning-filled life in his name – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pastor Ron Breight Christ Lutheran Church, Forest Hills, Pennsylvania