

Matthew 3:16-17, 28:16-20
The Family of God
Trinity Sunday June 11th, 2017

The Trinity, the inner unity and community of God is a concept and a mystery that goes beyond words, symbols, pictures and icons to explain and understand. Trinity existed before time and will be present after time ends. As men and women of the Bible would say, "It's too wonderful for me." But as mysterious and hard to comprehend as it is, it is worthy of our deepest contemplation and time and of course worship.

The basic teaching about the Trinity is that we believe in One God who has within the Godhead three distinct "persons": Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In terms of function God is known as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

In the last several weeks I have touched on some of the basic teachings and events of the resurrection of Jesus. I spoke of Jesus Ascension, the Giving of the Holy Spirit and this week it is the Trinity. These previous messages can be found on our web site.

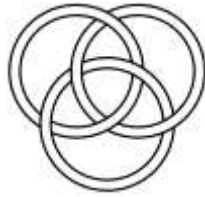
Many symbols are used to depict and explain the Trinity. One of the simplest is the shamrock: one leaf with three distinct leaflets.



Another is the fleur de leis



Intertwined circles



Other intertwined objects



And other intertwined objects where the line has no beginning or end, like our God has no beginning or end. Like the circle in this image.



The Celts were good at making these types of symbols trying again to put in a visual form a mystery, the mystery of the Triune God.

Now pictures have also been used to depict the Trinity. Here are two from classical art: You can tell they were painted by European artists.



And one from modern art. There are thousands and I mean thousands of artist renderings trying to depict the mystery of the Trinity.



Orthodox Church Icons are enraptured by the Trinity. Note the wings.



Note the figures all look alike. They are coequal. You can't really tell if they are male or female and they all incline towards each other to indicate their intimate relationship.



In this one they are sharing the intimacy of Holy Communion, again the table fellowship I have spoken of often. Finally, this one, it is called "Holy Trinity, The Hospitality of Abraham" by Andrei Rublev.



Did you notice that the first Icon and this Icon depict the 3 Angels that visited Abraham? Many theologians figure the mystery of the Trinity was present throughout the Bible and only became clearly apparent in the New Testament. Several passages that illuminate the Trinity have been read today and were in the Trinity Countdown for this service.



Again, here is a picture I've used called "Sarah Laughed" that shows Abraham and the 3 angels at the point they told Abraham that Sarah was going to have a baby and she laughed. The 3 angels in the passage are also referred to in the singular as Lord.

This passage reads, "The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him." Genesis 18:1-2a

And also, the concept of the Holy Trinity, the Triune nature of God goes all the way back to the beginning of our story, the human story. Genesis 1:26-27 says, "Then God said, "Let US make humankind in OUR image, according to OUR likeness; and let them have dominion ...So God created humankind in his image,

in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Did you note the "Us" and the "Our image"? Even in the very beginning of the Bible references to God are in the plural and God sends out his Spirit to create.

And all's good in creation until he gets to man. The problem with the man is that he is alone. Genesis 2:18 says, "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

And so God creates woman, in order that man and woman can fulfill their God given mission together, which is to be fruitful and multiple. Neither man, nor woman can complete their mission until they are in relationship together.

Now this message is titled "The Family of God". This is in the sense that the very inward nature of God can be seen and spoken of in terms of family relationship. In today's world, and the seminary experience I had, this was obscured in that we were penalized for speaking of God in masculine terms.

We were supposed to use language that was “non-sexist”, which meant we usually did not refer to God as Father and Jesus as his Son. We spoke of God in terms of function Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer and not relationship, particularly family relationship. It was “non-sexist” language, but it was rather sterile, hiding the type of relationship God wants with us that of a close loving family.

God wants a relationship of persons and personalities not just functional qualities. It is not what God does for us that is so important (Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer) but that God wants to know us and we know God.

I missed, and we miss that God is probably best described as a **Family, a Community of Unity**. We being made in the image of God fulfill God’s image by being in the family of God by birth and by choice.

God internally, and eternally is in a relationship of love. Each coequal person of the Trinity loves the other persons in the Trinity. To love there needs to be a person to love. God fulfills this internally by always having 2 others to love, but even that was not enough to fulfill God’s overflowing, endless creative love.

God needed more so he created us to love. Love, creativity and relationship are all what makes God, God and these are replicated in our lives when we live out our lives in love, relationship and creativity with each other.

God then can be thought of as a Family on Mission. Our identity is that of sons and daughters of God that are sent out to live out God’s will/mission/kingdom. We are the family representatives of our Heavenly Father to do God’s will on earth, to be and create God’s family here on earth. **We are to bring a representation of the heavenly Family/Community here on earth.**

“Within the Mystery that is the unity of the Godhead, there is community.

This community of persons is revealed at the baptism of Jesus, where “heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ Note the language of family! There is a Father speaking identity to a Son, and the empowering Spirit of God descending as a dove. This is the Trinity, as it was eventually called by the early church father Tertullian.

*The interesting thing about what the Father spoke over Jesus at his baptism, which anyone listening at the time would have recognized, was that they were words of commission, **sending Jesus on official family business.** Paul uses almost the same familial language when he sends Timothy to Corinth on gospel business, “**For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord.**”*

The revelation at the very beginning of Jesus’s ministry is that he is not operating independently, but he is coming from a Family to represent the Family.

*The Trinity isn’t simply an abstract concept to be contemplated by spiritual directors and scholars; it’s **a deeply relational reality** that tells us that at the very center of God’s nature there is community, A Family. God is Family. And the God who is family is on mission. God himself is Family on Mission.”* “Family on Mission” Mike & Sally Breen p. 22

Now the world is always attacking our identity as the sons and daughters of God. Remember, Satan immediately attacked Jesus’ identity after his baptism. Satan in his 3 temptations always began them by saying, “**If you are the Son of God...**” It was an attack on his identity, his relationship with God.

The world is always trying to tell us we are just accidents of “nature”, by products of the “big bang”. Or that we are simply the most successful competitors in the survival of the fittest.

But each and every one of us was created by God with a purpose. We have been created to live in relationship with each other and God, the Family of God. It’s in relationship with each other that we create the

Family of God, and retrace God's image in us. This is not a family of blood and biology but of "those who do the will of our Heavenly Father" as Jesus said.

So then if you are single, or come from a huge biological family you are called to create the Family of God here on earth by joining in relationship with others to do the will of God, the kingdom of God here on earth.

To paraphrase our VBS scripture this week, 'We have been created through him and for him and for each other—we are the family—the Family of God.'

You saw the family of God that was created this week at VBS.



Here is part of Vista's family that was gathered here last week on Pentecost Sunday.



So I encourage you to be in relationship with each other, to live out to the best of your ability the Family of God, the Trinity here on earth.

In Jesus' name, Amen.