

June 6, 2004

Holy Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

1 Today, being Trinity Sunday, we celebrate the triune nature of our Lord.  
2 As a festival, Holy Trinity is unique. Unlike other festivals, Holy Trinity  
3 does not commemorate a person or an event but a doctrine. While the  
4 doctrine of Trinity is central to our confessions, it is difficult to explain or  
5 understand, for in it we speak of a God who is three yet one, distinct yet  
6 unified.

7 In the readings for today, the Trinity is described by the work each part  
8 does. And it is clear that the persons of the Trinity do not function in the  
9 same way. Yet the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all intertwined.  
10 Each may have his own role to fulfill, but it is done so that God's ultimate  
11 mission might be accomplished. In creating, redeeming and nurturing the  
12 parts of the Trinity, God works to bring about the transformation and  
13 salvation of the world.

14 There is more to Trinity Sunday than the celebration of a difficult and  
15 mysterious doctrine. One can't help but see in the Trinity an amazing  
16 image of what the people of God might strive to be. What if we saw in  
17 one another individuals who are distinct but unified? That is to say, what  
18 if the church named itself as a collection of people with a variety of  
19 distinct gifts who have only one mission: The transformation of the world  
20 to one that is unified?

21 Look around this Sunday morning. Look up and down the pews. We may  
22 differ from one another in many ways. We have each been gifted in our  
23 own unique ways. God has entrusted us with our own set of treasures,  
24 talents, and time. Yet we use our gifts, in this one mission.

25 This Sunday, eight weeks after Easter, is when we as Christians celebrate  
26 the doctrine of the Trinity. Trinity Sunday was initiated as an affirmation  
27 of our fundamental Christian doctrine of the Trinity in the face of  
28 contrary beliefs put forward by such as the Gnostics and Arius, whose  
29 rationalistic approach to the Trinity was to deny the one-ness of the  
30 triune God, our Lord, and of course by doctrine held by non-Christian  
31 groups.

32 First, some vocabulary: Now the Trinity is the reference to what we  
33 otherwise would call the “triune nature of God”.

34

35 Now the term triune is defined in the dictionary as: consisting of or being  
36 three in one, for example, in the Christian Trinity; or, consisting of three  
37 members, especially the Christian Trinity.

38 This is not easy to understand! It is not as if we can say, “Sure, I get it,  
39 there are three aspects to the one Father.” It is, rather, that the one Lord  
40 has three persons. Now there has been much debate as to what defines  
41 the word, person. And of course we can talk about person in personality,  
42 which is not the same as a person, but is a manifestation of a person’s  
43 uniqueness.

44 Well, it is confusing, and has always been so. In fact, Martin Luther  
45 devoted not a few sermons to the idea of the Trinity. I would like to read  
46 an excerpt from one of these sermons, dated July 7th, 1537:

47 *In the beginning of his Gospel the evangelist John forcefully*  
48 *teaches and confirms the high article of our holy Christian*  
49 *faith that we believe and confess that there is one true,*  
50 *almighty, eternal God, but that there are three distinct Persons*  
51 *in this one divine Essence: God the Father, God the Son, God the*  
52 *Holy Ghost. The Father begets the Son from eternity, and the Holy*  
53 *Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son. So there are three*  
54 *distinct Persons and yet only one divine Essence of equal glory and*  
55 *majesty. The Person in the middle, the Son, and not the Father or*  
56 *the Holy Ghost, assumed human nature, born of the Virgin Mary,*

How wrong  
can you go  
quoting  
Luther?

57 *when the time of redemption was to begin. This Son of God,*  
58 *begotten by the Father from eternity, John first calls the Word and*  
59 *says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,*  
60 *and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Speaking later on of His*  
61 *incarnation, he says: "And the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14), as*  
62 *St. Paul also says (Gal. 4:4): "When the fullness of the time was*  
63 *come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman." I am in the habit*  
64 *of offering a homely, simple illustration in order to help people to*  
65 *some extent to understand this begetting of the Son of God by the*  
66 *eternal Father. It is this: As a bodily son has flesh and blood and*  
67 *his being from his father, so the Son of God, begotten by the*  
68 *Father, has His being and nature from the Father from eternity. But*  
69 *we cannot find a perfect illustration of this relation with this or any*  
70 *other example. The relation on earth cannot be as perfect as it is in*  
71 *the divine Majesty, where the Father gives the Son the entire divine*  
72 *Essence. A bodily father cannot give his son his entire being. There*  
73 *lies the inequality.*  
74 *We must believe this article. No man will grasp or comprehend it*  
75 *with his reason, though it be as wise, sharp, and acute as possible.*  
76 *If we could attain it by our wisdom, God would not have to reveal it*  
77 *from heaven or announce it to us through the Holy Scriptures.*

78 Last year, on Trinity Sunday, I told our well-traveled Pastor that I thought  
79 it might be interesting to look upon the nature of the Trinity as we do on  
80 the most common and most important thing in our existence: Water.

81 Well, water is pretty important stuff because without it we would not  
82 exist. I cannot fail to see rain as God's gift falling from above. (Something  
83 it may not be looked upon as such during times of flooding, I suppose,  
84 but it still is essential.)

85 Water is essential to our physical as well as our spiritual life. Physically we  
86 are constituted mostly of water, need it to live, and have a hard time  
87 when there is not enough of it.

88 We are baptized with water, and the first miracle we read about is when  
89 the Christ turns water to wine at the wedding in Cana. In John Chapter 3  
90 Verse 5, “Jesus answered, **I tell you the truth, no one can enter the**  
91 **kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit”.**

92 So, without begging the point, it can safely be said that water is essential  
93 to our physical and spiritual lives, although it is a simple compound – two  
94 atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen – and it is pretty common, making  
95 up about 70 percent of the earth’s surface.

96 What I find curious about water is that it, the simplest of things, shares a  
97 commonality with the Maker of all things: It exists in three states at the  
98 same time. Water exists as solid, liquid and gas at the same time. We call  
99 this the triple point of water, and it is an illustration of how three very  
100 different things can all be the same thing. That is, water, ice and water  
101 vapor (the gaseous form of water) are all made of the same thing, and are  
102 all the same thing, yet they are different. One is hard enough to skate or  
103 walk on, one is soft enough to swim through or bathe in, and one is  
104 invisible but is still there.

105 At the risk of being simplistic, I have found this simple comparison of  
106 water to the Trinity a means of getting closer to understanding that which  
107 we cannot fully understand. That is, while we can prove the existence of  
108 water in three forms at once, we cannot scientifically prove the co-  
109 existence of our triune God. That is where faith comes in. And faith,  
110 which is an attitude we accept purely because we believe it, often does  
111 not come without doubt.

112 While Luther did not believe that doubt was not sin, he also did not  
113 live in an age of science and factual proofs. We hold our faith in the  
114 face of our doubts, and of skeptics and rationalists; we celebrate  
115 today that which we believe as the cornerstone of our faith: **The**  
116 **Trinity**. It is really as simple a thing to accept as it is to accept the  
117 puddle will be a patch of ice, or evaporate to an invisible vapor.

**Comment on  
the death of  
President  
Reagan, and  
on D-Day,  
the water-  
borne  
liberation of  
Europe.**