

Trinity Sunday 2021 HFEC

We all have ways of describing things we cannot see.
Suppose you lived in the city and had never seen a squirrel,
but you had seen a rat.

Your friend might, who had seen a squirrel,
might describe it as a grey rat with a tail that resembled a bottle brush.
Because you lived in the city you have seen a rat and your mom uses a
bottle brush to clean the baby's bottles. So, you have a picture of a squirrel
– a quite silly one - even though you have never seen one.

Each week we say the Nicene Creed as an affirmation of our Trinitarian Faith. It is humankind's attempt to explain the God we cannot see. What we might not realize is that not all Christians agreed on this explanation especially on how the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit related to each other or even that that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were even God.

The early church was riddled with heresies.

Some thought Jesus was only a representative of God on earth and not actually God or God's Son. This precluded Jesus being co-existent with God for all time. Some thought the Holy Spirit was subservient to God the Father and God the Son and not co-equal.

The wording of our Nicene Creed still reflects this thought about the Holy Spirit.

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

In AD 1054 the Eastern and the Western Catholic churches split because the Western Church insisted that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son and was not equal to them. That difference has not been resolved to this day. Although, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church are in conversation over the matter.

Not withstand this controversy over the place of the Holy Spirit in the Creed, **it was not until the Council of Constantinople in AD 381** when most of the heresies were resolved and the **losers sent home** with their tails between their legs.

Part of the problem of why all of the confusion over the doctrine of the Trinity was so disputed was that there **is no systematic statement of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible.**

Now that I have spent almost 400 words on explaining, **briefly**, on how we got the Creed we say each Sunday,

I am going to tell you that **we should not get ourselves in tied up in knots over whether we believe everything that is written there.** It is a doctrine of the church. We should know and understand it as it informs our faith.

But, need not get ourselves stuck on the words.

Words have a tendency of **getting in the way of what is really important.**

Professor Caroline Lewis of Luther Seminary says,

“But I do fear when a doctrine takes over our imagination for God or when we try too hard to fit a doctrine into a biblical text or when we allow a rather complex affirmation about God’s activity in the world to replace real life experiences of God.”¹

Her point is that what is **REALLY** important is our **REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE OF GOD.**

How do we experience God in our daily lives?

I believe that how we experience God is more complex than can be explained in the 226 words of the Nicene Creed. This does not mean I do not believe in these words, but I believe they do not come **anywhere near to explaining how we experience God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit each and every day of our lives.**

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4648>

This being said, however, I do believe that the Trinity does help us in understanding our experience of God.

If we did not have the image of the Trinity, how would you experience God?

If we only had the Father or Creator, how would we relate to something that we had never seen?

We have never seen any part of God, but we have read the stories about Jesus walking the face of the earth healing, feeding, laughing, crying, suffering, and dying for us every week. We, also, have the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate which we read was revealed in **tongues of fire** on Pentecost.

We see **God the Creator** in the birds, the bees, the trees, the mountains, and the seas.

We **see and feel, Jesus**, a fellow human being, in each other and in the breaking of the bread.

We **feel the power of the Holy Spirit** when we gather together for the Eucharist and experience the transcendence of the music and the song of our communal voices rising in praise to God – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit –

Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God almighty!

Another way we experience God is in what we have learned and been reminded throughout our Christian journeys that **God is Love.**

God as love is expressed so eloquently in the Trinity.

The Trinity as a circle of love.

I'd like you all to take out your bulletins and look at the image on the front cover.

[Hold up Rublev while you talk.]

This is my favorite image of the Trinity.

It's a Russian icon, painted in the early 15th century by Andrei Rublev. It pictures the three angels who visited Abraham to tell him how near was the fulfillment of God's promise that he would be the father of many nations.

These three angels really were God visiting Abraham.

Icons are very complex, and rich with symbolism and significance.

There is no single explanation of all of it.

But here is one interpretation:

All three figures are clothed in the blue garments that signify divinity.

The figure on the left represents **God the Father** –

his blue robe almost completely hidden in the shimmering, cloud-like robe.

The Creator is not visible to us creatures.

Both hands clasp the staff of authority. (hard to see)

His head is slightly inclined toward the center of **their circle of love**.

Behind him is a house with open doors – the home of heaven – our ultimate goal.

The figure in the center represents **Jesus Christ – the Word of God**.

Along with his blue robe of divinity, he wears a brown, earthly garment – with the gold stripe of kingship on the arm.

The hand he lays on the table has two fingers extended – a gesture of blessing, and a reminder of his two natures, human and divine.

He blesses a chalice filled with the sacrificial meal.

His body faces the Spirit but he looks at the Father – his head inclined in respect and love.

Behind him is a tree, **the tree of life. The tree of the cross.**

The figure on the right represents the Holy Spirit.

The **blue robe of divinity** is covered with a light robe of **green** the color of **new life and of earth.**

The hand is laid on the table, connecting the Spirit with the earth and the eyes gaze downward more than the other two figures.

Behind the Spirit is a **mountain**, the **steep ascent of the spiritual life** that we must all travel.

Each figure is **inclined toward the others.**

We can almost feel the **connection** among the three of them.

It is clear that there is a deep relationship among them.

There's a window in the table on the side we look at. The window invites us into the depths of this relationship.

The relationship of love that is God.

There are many ways in which we experience God in our daily lives.

These are not explained in words in a doctrine.

However, the doctrine gives us a window into the circle of love that is God.

What we experience is how the mystery is revealed to us in our daily encounters with the creation, each other, and the transcendence of our encounters with the Holy Spirit.

Last week we experienced a disastrous event in our community- the senseless murder of nine of our brothers in the VTA railyard. It is hard to explain why this happened. We have been given so much by God in creation and the lives we lead here in our city and beyond. God, our Father, is our example of love. God demonstrates this in all that we see around us,

in the loving relationships we experience in our families and here in our church, and the example of love we see in the Gospels through God the Son, Jesus.

The man who committed this despicable act did not feel the Love of God, nor the love of his fellow humans. It is more important than ever to respond to the words of the Lord in our Isaiah reading “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” by saying “Here am I; send me!” and go into the world spreading the love of God to all we meet so that all may feel it!