

## Sermon Transcript

### 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022

#### TITLE

Last week we recalled that day when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples of Jesus making and moulding them into the Church and empowering them to do God's work. Today in many denominations it's Trinity Sunday as it's the second Sunday after Pentecost. I've not marked Trinity Sunday before, so I'm going to this year for the first – and last – time as the Pastor of this church!

Why have a Sunday that focuses on God as Trinity? Last week was Pentecost, when we remembered how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples. Trinity Sunday has been observed since the middle ages to counter the many heresies and misconceptions about the Holy Spirit, the Son and the Father that developed in the first few centuries.

#### SHEMA

As Christians we affirm the Hebrew *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4 which says: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one* – we have one God (we are monotheistic) – but that in the NT scriptures, we discover our one God has three constituent Persons: Father, Son and Spirit.

Here's one definition of the Trinity in an encyclopedia:

#### DEFINITION

*Trinity, in Christian doctrine, is the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead. The doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be one of the central Christian affirmations about God. (Encyclopedia Britannica)*

#### QUOTE

Someone else wrote: *As all orthodox Christians agree, the doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is one essence but three Persons; God has one nature, but three centers of consciousness; God is only one What, but three Whos. (Got Questions.org)*

If you follow up my sermons in the items for discussion and reflection, I will give you a couple passages from the NT to look at this week where we see the persons of the Trinity, both acting in unity and also in distinctive individual ways.

What God has revealed to us in His written word is just what's there. There is no intent to rationalise what we call the Trinity. Many have tried to do so down the years and here are three incorrect approaches some have taken that are just not in the Bible some of which you may be familiar with.

#### SOME ERRORS

##### 1. TRITHEISM

Muslims think us to be polytheistic, having three gods. It's not so and never has been – the Lord our God the Lord is one. The Christian faith is monotheistic.

##### 2. MODALISM

God is seen as having different modes of operation which He switches between according to what is needed. It's called modalism. In other words, he puts on a persona appropriate to the task. An

illustration you may have heard over the years is pure modalism is that God is like water: one molecule (H<sub>2</sub>O) but can be ice, water or vapour according to temperature. But is God someone who changes His persona according to situation? No, this isn't how the Bible presents Him: so in Ephesians 1; we see Father, Son and Spirit each existing concurrently and having distinctive roles and characteristics.

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There have been other views of the Trinity that have seen God as being Father in heaven, and the Son and the Spirit are lesser than Him – lesser gods. There is much “trinitarian” artwork that portrays the Father as an old man, the Son as the cross and the Spirit a dove.

### 3. ARIANISM

At the very worst there is the error of Arianism, there those who see the Son as the highest created being and the Spirit as a mere force of God's breath. JW and Unitarians are both Arian and don't fall under the description of “Christian”.

There is no definition of the Trinity that explains one God, three Persons: no killer analogy that will help us understand better.

#### ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

One of the most accepted understandings of the Trinity is known as the Athanasian Creed. It dates from the late 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> centuries but has been attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria (who lived a century earlier) even though it almost certainly wasn't written by him. It's regarded as one of the the best descriptions of the Trinity that defines orthodox Christianity and is accepted by most Western Churches, particularly Protestant ones. I might add, that the word Trinity postdates the NT, being first used to describe One God, three Persons in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Here's part of the Athanasian Creed.

#### EXCERPT

*We worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,  
neither blending their persons  
nor dividing their essence.*

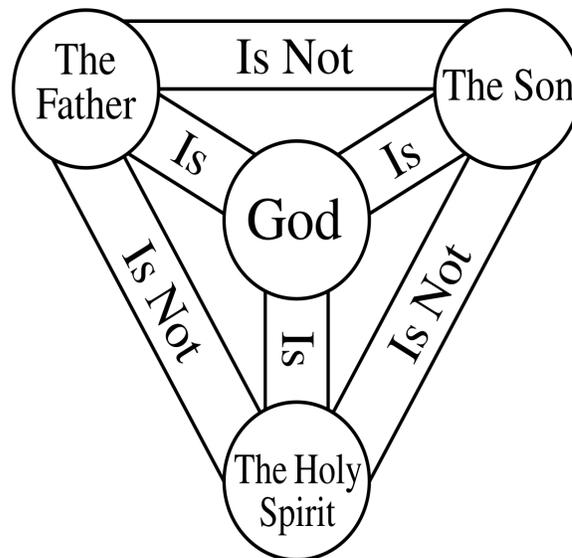
*For the person of the Father is a distinct person,  
the person of the Son is another,  
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.*

*But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,  
their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal.*

The TRIANGLE below derives from it. Quite how it all works in practice still has more questions to it than answers – it's just how it is – how the Bible presents it to us. Unbelievers see it as a contradiction – how can One be Three? In philosophy it is known as an ANTINOMY - *a real or apparent mutual incompatibility of two laws or truths*. Because the “antinomy” of the Trinity appears in the same passages e.g. Romans 8, Ephesians 1, the references to one God and three persons is intentionally there; Paul may even have had a clearer idea of Trinity than we do. For the rest of the last 2000 years, the Trinity is one of those concepts that defies easy explanation. We can get close; we can have glimpses of the the totality of the God we worship but understanding the infinite is difficult.

QUOTE I found this comment on one website I read up for on this: *The first Sunday after Pentecost is also called Trinity Sunday. This is supposed to be the Sunday where you explain the Trinity. Good luck with that.*

More helpfully, PSALM 145:3 says; *Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.* God is powerful enough to bring the universe into being with just a few words, so perhaps it's not unrealistic to find we can't fathom His greatness! Trinity is one of those unfathomables, because if it was easily understood, we would not be having something called Trinity Sunday after 2000 years of church history!



WHY IS THE TRINITY IMPORTANT TO US? To grow in our faith we need to know more of God and to do that we need to understand who He is and how He works. We may not be able to completely fathom the Trinity as much as we would like to, but God has given us enough to be able to know Him, to trust Him, to walk with Him, to understand His will, to be the people He has called us to be. And that starts from the beginning of our faith. Do you remember the great Commission from three Sundays ago? Here it is:

VERSE

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Matthew 28:18-20

We are called to make disciples and baptise them. In whose name? *The Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* We see a Trinitarian command here. Why is that significant? TITLE Our growth as believers is a product of God acting in our lives as three persons, together and individually. Our going is something that involves the entirety of the Godhead.

What this does, is help us have balance in how we grow and how we encourage others to grow. The TABLE is a summary of what Father, Son and Spirit do in two of the significant passages in the NT. We read one of them. They are not the only ones and the lists are not exhaustive.

Person	Romans 8	Ephesians 1
<b>Father</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sends His own Son</li> <li>• Condemns sin in the flesh</li> <li>• Gives life to mortal bodies</li> <li>• Predestines and calls us</li> <li>• Justifies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blesses us with every spiritual blessing</li> <li>• Chooses and predestines us</li> <li>• Lavishes riches of His grace upon us</li> <li>• Makes known the mystery of His will</li> <li>• Gives us an inheritance</li> </ul>
<b>Son</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Died</li> <li>• Was raised</li> <li>• Intercedes for us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives us redemption through His blood</li> <li>• Forgives our trespasses</li> </ul>
<b>Spirit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dwells in us</li> <li>• Leads us</li> <li>• Bears witness with our spirit</li> <li>• Helps us in our weakness</li> <li>• Intercedes for us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seals us</li> <li>• Guarantees our inheritance</li> </ul>

You can potentially learn an enormous amount about God from just working through the points in just this table an understanding what they mean for you. For today, I'd like to emphasise just a few points for us to be challenged by:

1. UNDERSTAND WHO YOU ARE – we are children of God, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ. We are special, chosen, loved. Live like who you are!
2. UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD HAS DONE TO REDEEM YOU. You're ransomed, healed restored and forgiven. Live in freedom.
3. UNDERSTAND THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS IN YOU On a day to day basis, the Spirit is the motive power of our faith. He makes it alive in us. The problem is, many of us older folk were brought up in a day where the doctrine of the Spirit was played down. As a result, we have been robbed of God's power – He helps us in weaknesses, helps us know everything of God, intercedes for us (note the Son does it too). Remember that we don't have three gods, just the one God with three Persons who work together in harmony.

#### TITLE

When we understand we are children of God, redeemed, forgiven and have the Holy Spirit within us, then we go in the name of the One who has done all this: Father, Son and Holy Spirit because it is the Trinity working in unity and harmony that has made it so, and will make it so in the lives of others.

Our Trinitarian God wants each of His people, to know Him in His entirety, Father, Son and Spirit. Allow His Spirit to fill you with the hope that being a child of God brings, allow Him to let you understand that in the Son, you are free from sin and its consequences and can be everything God wants you to be. Allow His Spirit to fill you with power to be witnesses of God, Father, Son and Spirit. In the name of Jesus and in the authority of God, Father, Son and Spirit we declare this! Amen!

Let's affirm that now as we sing of our God who is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## **For reflection and discussion**

*Read Romans 8:1-17 and Ephesians 1:1-14*

1. What can you identify in these passages that tell us that we follow and worship one God. What other passages in the NT also affirm this?
2. In his sermon, Mark reproduced this table which illustrates what the Father, Son and Spirit each do in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1. (Why not try the same exercise for yourself?) What do we learn about each person of the Trinity? How does this diversity relate to how we experience God in our daily lives?
3. How may the doctrine help us understand that God is transcendent (exists beyond our normal physical level) but is also immanent (manifest within the world) and even personal?
4. How may knowing that God is Father, Son and Spirit help us in communicating the message of the gospel to others?