Springfield Presbyterian Church

May 26th, 2024

Creator, Redeemer, Spirit

1. Intro

When I was in North Carolina for my recent Christian Education

event, I had the opportunity to catch up with a good friend who serves as a Christian Educator in another state. She shared with me that her daughter loves to create zines, which are these little magazines or booklets you can self-create to share your art or poetry – essentially, anything you’d like to put on paper. Her daughter decided to write a new ‘Bible’ and each page read as follows, “God created the world, the Bible was written by men, God is God, Jesus is Jesus, and the Spirit is the Spirit. The End.”

Now, bear in mind that my friend here is a Christian Educator, so when her daughter brought the zine to her, she said, “Well, this is all true, but you know that God and Jesus and the Spirit are also One, right?” And her daughter just looked at her, frustrated, “But that ruins my zine! How can that be, anyway?”

I took a deep breath on behalf of my friend, because I know what all believers know – the trinity is an impossible concept for any human brain to understand. I asked her how she responded, and I thought it was brilliant, she said to her daughter, “You’re curious and you are asking the right questions – keep asking them.”

And yes, she tried to explain, to explain this narrative that the Trinity is God – who is one, but also three. She tried to parse it out, but explained that it is a big mystery that none of us can understand.

1. The history of the Trinity

And I sit alongside my friend here, because we’re in a real pickle

here. While I chose our readings today, as the best description of the Trinity I could find, we also face the reality that the Trinity is never mentioned in the Bible. Not once. We hear of the relational nature of God – God, Jesus, Spirit – who are all doing something, but have individual purposes. But this relationship was never given a name, until around the year 300.

That’s when a bunch of scholars came together and eventually wrote what we know as the Nicene creed, which is an affirmation we will share after the sermon. The reason for the creed is the same as many of the reasons we have for our confessions or affirmations today – they come out of controversy. The Nicene Creed, in particular, wanted to refute Arianism, which was run by a guy named Arian, who believed that Jesus was not around for all time, but rather, born later during the time of the Gospels. There were also other controversies, similar in nature, going on at the time, and so, the Council of Nicea came together to try to set things straight.

The word Trinity comes from another theologian, about 100 years before the council met, who used the word Trinity. The word trinity comes from the Latin, Trinitas – meaning ‘the tripleness.’ This theologian used this word to describe God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit working together, so it made sense for the council to take that word on as their guidepost.

1. Why does it matter

The reality is, humans are trying to figure out this great mystery

that is God. From my friend’s daughter, to the council that met those many, many centuries ago, the human inclination to name who God is and what God does is tempting. When we have a framework, we feel more comfortable, and perhaps we feel more stable in our faith.

Yet, the reality that also remains is that our human framework can never start to explain who God is – there are no words to aptly describe God’s being. We can use the word Trinity, we can approach God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit with awe and wonder at the ways they complement each other in divine action, but at the end of the day, this is all a great mystery.

1. Each part

Something I find helpful is to think about each part of the Trinity and how they interact. The word, God kind of covers it all – when we say God, we can mean Jesus or the Spirit, but God is our default description of all of the divine things that go on in the world. When we think of Jesus, we think of this human and divine being coming alongside people in their everyday lives in a Jerusalem a long, long time ago and shows us resurrection power. When we consider the Spirit, we think about this very amorphous entity – this thing that lives and speaks within us. In modern secular culture, people often reference her as the conscious, or that gut feeling. We tend to hear the most about God in the Old Testament, Jesus in the New Testament, and then the Spirit, also called Wisdom, is woven between them and sometimes you have to read between the lines to find her.

1. Trinity Sunday

So that’s my best primer, one-minute explanation of the Trinity,

but I know I’m far from any complete or concrete definition. As we come to this Sunday though, I have to wonder – why do we always celebrate the Trinity this Sunday, the Sunday after Pentecost? What is the knowledge of the Trinity supposed to do in our lives – how does this knowing change us? These are the questions of a curious believer.

The first reason for this Sunday, in my understanding, is partly education. There is no other Sunday where we take the time to explain that indeed, we believe in the Trinity. Often, in any service, we focus upon one element, whether that is God, Jesus, or the Spirit. This is a rare moment, a rare space where we get to acknowledge that our God is not one entity, but rather, our God is up to a lot in many different ways.

I think another reason is to sit here as humans and be completely in awe of the Trinity and to be humbled by the mystery. If anyone tells you they have the Trinity all figured out – be suspicious, be very suspicious. While we can conceptualize the idea to a certain extent with our human minds, God’s wisdom is always going to be a mystery. It should be – this is one of those moments where you can say for sure, “God is God and I am not” and simply be in awe.

In trying to find a creative way to name the Trinity, I befriended the Rev. Google. I searched, “How would you explain the Trinity to a child?” not because I think you are children, but because sometimes going to that basic understanding is really helpful; it usually puts things in simpler language. I laughed when most of the searches came back saying, “just say that the trinity means that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead” or “Well, the Nicene Creed lays it out, just go there.” I tilted my head to the side and thought – none of this helps for any age, it’s too lofty.

The most helpful, simplistic way I heard it phrased was to think of God as an egg. There are three parts to an egg – the shell, the yoke, and the white fluffy stuff. Admittedly, my ADHD kicked in, and I found a great recipe for meringue… and if you ask after the service, I’ll email it to you…but, okay, let me refocus. So there are three parts to an egg – they can live separately and independently, but they also are part of a whole egg. It’s not really an egg without a shell, and it’s not really considered an egg without a yolk. The three pieces are important, they all serve a purpose, and they all do different things.

Am I telling you that the Trinity is an egg? Yep. It’s the closest human description I think we’ll get to at the moment, but maybe, if someone asks you what the Trinity is – it’s a good place to start. Everything else is just a great mystery.

1. The Readings

I won’t speak much about our Scripture readings this morning,

because again, we do not hear the word Trinity. Yet, I find the first chapter of John probably the most helpful – it tells us again that Jesus has been here from the beginning of time. John is very clear that Jesus is the Messiah. John wants you to know that Jesus and God are the same from the very beginning of the Gospel.

1. What do we glean

So, friends, from this space, what do we glean? We glean that

the Trinity is a mystery and that, while the reality of this complex idea can be overwhelming, it can also be really beautiful and humbling. Rest your heads and hearts – we won’t be able to name this beautiful God we celebrate, no words will suffice, but rather, let us see all that God is doing in our lives through those three lenses.

May you celebrate, may you be in awe, may you be in wonder of what our Creator is doing among us, who grants us each breath of new life. May you be forever marked by the waters of baptism that Jesus shared with us, and the power of resurrection in which we take shelter and knowledge of a new Kingdom to come. And may you be emboldened and encouraged by the Spirit, who continues to move and guide through each one of us, each and every day, in profound and powerful ways. Let us praise the Trinity, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit. Alleluia and amen!