



Sunday June 12, 2022
John 16:12-15 (Trinity Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompañado

Introduction: *Who's on First skit*

I don't know about you, but this head swirling skit from Abbot and Costello is exactly what it feels like every time I've been on the receiving or delivery end of any well-meaning but inadequate attempt at explaining the Trinity.

Let's face it: Trinity Sunday is a hard sell. While most of our Christian festivals honor big, dramatic events – *the birth of Jesus, the Resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost* – Trinity Sunday on the other hand asks us to celebrate an idea that we struggle to wrap our heads around, no matter how hard we try.

We have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – they are all three distinct persons but are all God. And there are several ways that we visually try to explain it. One is with an egg – you have the egg shell, the egg yolk, and the egg white. They are all distinct parts, but they are all egg. Another way we try to explain the Trinity is by referring to water – a glass of water, an ice cube, and steam – each are different, but all are still water.

All these analogies fall short, and none of them address the deeper question of *Why. Why should we care?* What difference does the three-in-one make? Fine, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But so what?

Now I'm not trying to be flippant, because the "*so-what*" question seems to me an essential one. Many of us are tired. Physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Some of us are struggling with illness, or loss, or troubled relationships, or financial difficulty. Some of us are lonely, disappointed, angry, and disheartened. Some of us are barely hanging onto belief in one God. And now on Trinity Sunday we're supposed to contemplate *three? Why?*

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus tells his disciples, "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.*" I think this line from Jesus is easy to miss and even easier to misunderstand. When I read these words closely and carefully, I don't hear Jesus being dismissive or derogatory. Instead, what I hear is tenderness. There's a depth of patience and moderation that Jesus offered to his disciples. He didn't burden their frightened and wary hearts with more than they could handle. What he did was promise them the Spirit of truth – the Spirit of ongoing revelation.

So, as I spent time contemplating the Three-in-One this week, what I'm finding in Jesus's promise is a safe and gentle place from which to begin. Meaning, I don't have to understand everything right now. I don't have to find the perfect analogy or metaphor to explain the three-fold fullness of God. The Trinity isn't material for bumper stickers or clever internet memes; instead, it's a great and holy mystery, and my first job – our first job, is to stand in humbly before it.

To explore the nature of God's identity is to come to the end of what our limited human language can illuminate. It's to become speechless. It's to fall to our knees and say, "I can't possibly hold the singularity, the otherness, the strangeness of this God. I can't control him." All we can do is seek the truth with our whole hearts, and trust that Jesus's promise stands. All we can do is wait and watch for the Spirit who will come and reveal God's truth to us...in God's time.

In our divided and polarized culture, it's easy to imagine that we have the monopoly on God. That *our* articulation of faith, *our* liturgy, *our* denomination, and *our* worship practices capture the best version of who God is and what God desires. One thing the Trinity does by its very complexity is challenge this assumption. The truth of God will always exceed us. It will always be beyond our grasp. The truth of God will always be more than our tiny, easily overwhelmed minds can comprehend. And the truth of God will always confront, convict, and remake us, even as it calms and affirms us.



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So, we begin by humbly acknowledging that we're out of our league. But now what? Is there anything then that we can say with assurance on this Trinity Sunday? I read a reflection from a Franciscan priest who argues that caring about the Trinity requires orienting ourselves in a new way, "*Don't start with the One and try to make it into Three,*" he writes. "*Start with the Three and see that this is the deepest nature of the One.*"

Start with the Three and see that this is the deepest nature of the One. What might it look like to follow this advice? What will we discover about God's character, God's personality, God's priorities, and God's reality, if we see the three-fold-ness of God as the grounding and essence of God's being?

First, we'll see that God is dynamic. If God is triune, then God doesn't exist in stillness. Rather, God is fluid. God moves. God flows. God dances. The truth is we worship a God who is always on the move, always spilling over, always organic – always a surprise. Poet Kenn Storck writes, "Expand don't contract God"

When we do this then we'll see that God is diverse. If God exists in three persons, then each person has their own way of embodying and expressing goodness, love, and righteousness. Goodness, to be goodness, needs contrast and tension, not perfect uniformity. And if God can embody goodness through contrast and tension, then it's worth asking why we can't – or won't. Why do we fear difference so much when difference lies at the very heart of God's nature?

Next, we'll see that God is communal. It's one thing to say that God values community or that God thinks community is good for us. It's another thing to say that God *is* community. That God *is* relationship, intimacy, connection, and communion. If God is interactive at God's very heart – if Three really is the deepest nature of the One – then what are we doing when we isolate ourselves from each other? When we decide to go at it alone? When we regard independence and autonomy over companionship and mutuality? God is relationship, and it is only in relationship that we'll experience the fullness of God.

Then, we'll see that God is hospitable. In the 15th century, Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev created one of the most well-known and beloved pieces of artwork in Christianity called, "The Hospitality of Abraham," also known as "The Trinity." In it, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are depicted as three angels sitting around a table, sharing food and drink. Their faces are nearly identical, but they're dressed in different colors. The Father wears gold, the Son blue, and the Spirit green. The Father gazes at the Son. The Son gazes back at the Father, but gestures towards the Spirit. The Spirit gazes at the Father, but points toward the Son with one hand, and opens up the circle with the other, making room for others to join the sacred meal. The icon radiates love and intimacy – clearly, the three persons around the table respect and enjoy each other. But it also exudes openness. There is space at the table for the viewer of the icon. For you. For me. For us. As if to say, the point of the great Three-in-One is not exclusivity but radical hospitality.

The point of the Three is always to add one more, to extend the invitation, to make the holy table more expansive and more welcoming. In fact, the deeper the intimacy between the Three grows, the larger the table grows. In the same way, the closer we draw to the love of the Three, the wider and more hospitable our hearts grow towards the world around us.

And finally, we'll see that God is love. The Trinity at its heart is an expression of deep, unwavering, and life-giving love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The relationship between the persons of the Trinity is not a relationship of power, manipulation, or jealousy. It's a relationship of unselfish and sacrificial love. Which begs the question: if God's very being is grounded in love, and we are created in God's image, then who are we when we're not motivated by love?

All this takes me back to my earlier question then. Why should we care about the Trinity? Well, my friends, we should care because we are children of this three-in-one God. The children of a mysterious, fluid, diverse, communal, hospitable, and loving God who wants to guide us into the whole truth of who God is and who we are. We should care because the mystery of the Trinity has the power to transform our hearts and our lives, leading us towards unity. And I pray that today and always, our lives would reflect the truth and beauty of this mysterious and amazing Triune God. Thanks be to God. Amen!