

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
May 31, 2026- Trinity Sunday (A)
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT

Genesis 1: 1-2; 4; Psalm 8; 1 Cor 13: 11-13; Matthew 28: 16-20

“I rise this morning, through a mighty strength— The invocation of the Trinity, through the belief in the threeness, through the confession of the oneness of the Creator of creation.” - A prayer of St. Patrick †

Every year, on the Sunday following the close of the Easter season, on the Sunday after Pentecost... we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Trinity. This is a particularly important day, for today we acknowledge one of the most complex and unique aspects of the Christian faith— whether one is Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox—the belief of one God in three persons... perhaps the most sublime and difficult concept of our faith. Today the Church bids me to give a ‘sermon,’ rather than a homily, which reflects mostly on the scriptures for the day. I am to give a sermon... that is “a statement of doctrinal truth given in an engaging manner.” So... The doctrine of the Trinity says, God is One, eternal and before time. God reveals God’s self in three persons, all equal in majesty and splendor—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Nicene Creed/ Creed St. Athanasius- BCP 864). And, the Father is in the Son and Holy Spirit, yet the Father is not the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son, but they are co-equal. Sound too complex?

Well, we’ve all heard the simple explanations of the Trinity by St. Augustine: of the tree, with roots made of wood, the trunk made of wood, the branches made of wood; all are wood, one substance, but three entities. Or by St. Patrick: of the three-leafed clover, three closely united parts all belonging to one single entity, the clover. And yet, these still don’t express the complexity of God. Frankly, I’m not smart enough to explain it, and probably none of us is smart enough to understand it... it’s a mystery. The doctrine of the Trinity is so hard to grasp because it’s the Church’s effort— that is, a human effort— to give coherent expression to the mystery of *who* God is... To try to explain God’s grace and love announced in the Scriptures and experienced by the faithful throughout history.

This week, I couldn’t help but wonder, with all the chaos going on in our world, ‘Does it really matter to most human beings that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?’ Why does any of this stuff matter? What if we don’t buy it? What if we have doubts? Interestingly, today’s Gospel reveals that even the disciples had doubt, ‘When they saw him, they worshiped him; *but some doubted.*’ It makes me feel better, like I’m in good company. Even better is Jesus’ reassurance to them in this passage... Even if you don’t believe it, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The reassurance of an ongoing relationship, full of love and compassion.

A few years ago, at this time, I was privileged to visit to Vancouver (Western Canada) to perform a friend’s marriage. I had the opportunity to see and visit old friends and to meet new ones. The weather was lovely, and I had time to walk around the neighborhood near English Bay. Amid its beautiful wealthy neighborhoods, I noticed many families with young children and several old retirees walking around, and I also noticed many homeless sleeping in the streets (so common in all our big cities), and everyone varied in ethnicity, it’s a most diverse

community. The wedding was a same-sex, Queer Wedding that took place in an old Anglican Church. Coming from rural New England, I was struck by the diversity of the people in attendance... young and old, rich and poor, and every variety of ethnicities. I was also struck by a feeling of exclusivity, even among the diversity. Several people expressed that they '*only* have queer friends' now, only gay friends, they no longer seek to spend time with those who are not queer. At the hotel bar, a well-to-do conservative explained to his colleague how he no longer would speak or interact with any 'silly liberals because they only want to take away our money.' An Asian man in the lobby pleaded with his daughter never to go out with a Westerner. Even after I returned home, I kept noticing people expressing the desire to restrict contact with anyone who didn't share their same views and thoughts. It all seemed very odd and contrary to how I was raised as a Christian.

Now, I certainly realize that such feelings can stem from past suffering and years of oppression, usually expressed by some who've lived a hidden/ shadow life and yearn not to have to explain who they are anymore. The challenge is not to fall into the mindset of exclusivity and segregation, that seems to be so common everywhere these days.

As an openly gay man, I've experienced just how cruel and oppressive society can be. And some of the cruelest behavior and greatest prejudice I have witnessed has stemmed from these communities, not just toward outsiders but toward those living within. In the gay world, there are classic divisions and prejudices between the 'pretty ones' who are young and in shape and those who are not, between those who are 'educated' and those who are not, between those who are 'rich and successful' and those who are not. My point is, even in an oppressed and marginalized society, there is marginalization. So often, as history has shown, those who have been oppressed often become oppressors. Many of my African American friends who are women or gay have shared just how oppressive their own black family and black church experiences were. Again, I would submit that this is true of any communal group, including political organizations.

It's also something I've experienced within our churches in Connecticut, between those who are ultra-liberal and those who are more conservative, each pushing their own specific agendas... among those who claim to be 'born again' and somehow feel superior to others in the church... and those who only believe right worship to be according to Rite 1, "the way it's always been done."

There's a great human desire to segregate and make distinctions, and it's NOT what Jesus taught. As St. Paul has written, "the Lord is Lord of all" (Rom 10.12) and "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). As I prayed this week, it became clear to me that the concept of the Trinity has a lot to tell us about living in 'community.'

The social aspect of the Trinity—three co-equal persons at work together— is the paradigm of what it means to live in community and to be in relationship with others. God is triune and social in nature. Specific language has often been used to make us think of God the Father as the Creator, the Son as the Redeemer, and the Spirit as the Sanctifier... and while that's true in a sense, it ventures into a heresy called 'modalism' ... trying to break God into definable parts, something which is impossible to do and thus, flawed.

All the acts of the Triune God in the world, past and present, are indivisible among the three persons... God the Father does not act alone in creation, God the Son does not act alone in redemption, God the Spirit does not act alone in the sanctification and nurturing of God's people. All three work together. The Trinity, as seen through the eyes of Scripture, is a dynamic relationship of persons always together, working in unison from the beginning of Creation... to the call of the Hebrew people... to their rescue from bondage and the Exodus... to the commission of the disciples and their witness of Jesus' actions in this world. In theology, the term *perichoresis* is used to describe the interaction of the 3 equal persons of the Trinity. It's Greek and refers to an *ongoing dance* with equal flow among equal participants.

Faith history has revealed that the Holy Trinity, exemplifies a relationship of freedom, self-sharing, mutual love and service, and we are invited into that relationship, for we are told in Genesis, we're created in the image of the Triune God: 'God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.'

Of course, none of us is perfect. All our lives involve a web of relationships, some of them strong and some of them strained... some very close and some quite distant... some of our relationships are intact while others are broken... And the same is true within the Church and within all communities.

My wish for all of us this Trinity Sunday, is to allow the Holy Trinity to enter into our hearts, into our lives. Working not to marginalize ourselves or others, but to be inclusive. Join the dance (*perichoresis*) of the three-in-one and let's move in this world sharing God's grace and love with everyone we meet! †