

"TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY"

II Corinthians 13:11-13

I want to give you a quick snapshot of the church year. In the season of Advent, which takes place during the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas, we proclaim the truth: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). And then the 6 weeks leading up to Easter, known as Lent, is a time for us to discover: "For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God" (II Corinthians 5:21). And then at Easter we celebrate Christ's victory over sin: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Peter 1:3). And then last Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, we receive the promise of the gospel: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies

also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). This brings us to this Sunday which is known in the Christian church as Trinity Sunday. This is a day we can pause and look back over the story of salvation that has already been proclaimed in Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. Today, we focus on the doctrine of the Trinity which "proclaims the very heart of God." Trinity Sunday really brings together this unbelievable drama of salvation to the world.

But someone might ask, "What is the Trinity?" Well, within His own mysterious being God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And these designations are just ways in which God is God. **Within the Godhead there are three "persons" who are neither three Gods nor three parts of God, but they are coequally and coeternally God.**

I once heard of a family who had friends from India who were traveling around California on business. And they decided to leave their 11 year-old daughter with this family.

The girl was curious about the family going to church one Sunday morning and so she decided to go along. When the family returned home after church the father asked her what she thought about the service. She said, "I don't understand why the West Coast isn't included too." When they asked her what she meant, she added, "You know, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the whole East Coast."

Today I baptized Genesis Janae Jefferies in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Father, Son and Holy Spirit= the Trinity. But what is this "Trinity" all about. It really is a mystery especially since **the Christian faith is a monotheistic faith** which means "**one God**". "The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to draw out the implications of the biblical revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is not contained formally [the Trinity] in Scripture but is both an inference and a construction from the Bible." (*A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson, 1969, Westminster Press, p.345.)

Let me ask you- do you think God has a sense of humor? I've always said He created me (and you) so I guess He does. How many of you have ever heard of "Abbott and Costello" those two comedians of days gone by? They became one of the most popular comedy teams during the 1940's. Abbott and Costello are best remembered for a comedy routine that used the sport of baseball. As a matter of fact, thanks to the endurance of their most popular and influential routine, "[Who's on First?](#)"— whose rapid-fire word play and comprehension confusion set the preponderant framework for most of their best-known routines—the team of Abbott and Costello is, as a result, featured in the [Baseball Hall of Fame](#). (Contrary to popular belief, however, the duo was not inducted into the Hall).

I recently came upon a take on their skit, "Whose on First?" trying to explain the Trinity and I'd like to share it with you now. Keith Morgenstern will be playing Bud Abbott and I will be Lou Costello. So here goes.

LC: Bud, you're a very smart man and you know many things. I bet you know a lot about religion. BA: Well, yes, Lou, I do. What would you like to know about religion? LC: Last weekend I went to the park and there was a church group having a picnic and they had a big sign that said "Holy Trinity Church". Well, Bud, I've driven around town and I have seen churches named St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John, and on and on but I've never heard of this St. Trinity. Who is this St. Trinity? BA: Trinity is not a saint, Lou.

Trinity is one of the ways that all Christians have come to understand God as revealed by Jesus Christ when He came to earth to live among us. The Trinity is God, one God- Three Persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. LC: That sure sounds like three gods to me. BA: No, Lou, one God, three persons- It's a mystery, Lou. LC: Well; Bud, come to think of it, this is a very big world and universe and there are lots of people for God to watch.

So probably the Father works the day shift, the Son the night shift and the Holy Spirit the graveyard shift. BA: No, Lou. No shifts. God's working all the time. LC: O.K. so if God's working all the time, it's still a very big world, so maybe God divides it up in thirds- a third for the Father, a third for the Son and a third for the Holy Spirit. BA: No, Lou, no thirds, no divisions, God is undivided. (Lou scratches his head for a minute and then says to Bud)

LC: Well, Bud, let me ask it to you this way. I think God must be a baseball fan- after all the first words of the Bible says, "In the Big Inning". BA: No, Lou, it's "In the beginning" not "In the big inning". LC: Any way, Bud, you know how I like baseball. So let's say that God's team was playing a baseball game and God's team was up at bat. The Father hits a single- "Who's on first? BA: God. LC: The Father. BA: That's right, Lou. LC: Then the Son comes up and hits a single. The Father goes to second base and the Son goes to first base. Whose on first? BA: God. LC: I thought God was on second base. BA: That's right. LC: O.K.- then the Holy Spirit comes up and

lays down a perfect bunt. The Father goes to third base, the Son goes to second base and the Holy Spirit beats out the throw- Safe at first. Whose on first? BA: God. LC: I thought God was on second and third. BA: That's right, Lou. God's on second and third. God is on first too. God is on all the bases. LC: I don't get it, Bud.

Let me stop right here- thanks Keith. Obviously from our skit Bud Abbott couldn't explain the Trinity. And I have trouble, at times, explaining the mystery of the Trinity and you read books written by brilliant theologians and it's still Greek to many. The mystery of the Trinity is really beyond our human comprehension- three persons in one God, each totally and completely God. And yet as followers of the risen Christ we need to try and get our hands around this important Christian doctrine.

Here in our scripture passage the Apostle Paul makes reference to the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Long before the church developed a formal doctrine of the Trinity, Paul was using the three Persons of the Trinity

in his benedictions- which is exactly what we find in our passage today. At the end of this letter to the Corinthians he is saying his goodbyes with a prayer for the presence in their lives of the grace that finds its source in Christ, and the love that God inspires, and the partnership of life that the Holy Spirit creates. Thus he says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."

According to *The Oxford Companion of the Bible*, verse 13 is the earliest evidence for a tripartite formula.

It has been suggested that the formation of Trinitarian belief was intentionally gradual. Gregory Nazianzen argues in his *Orations*, "The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit Himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself."

For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the Father was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was not yet received to burden us further." Intentionally gradual!

Let me invite you to open up your Bibles as we read some passages that directly refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and support a Trinitarian theology. Matthew 3:16-17: "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'" Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God."

And finally Hebrews 9:14: "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!"

As I wrap up this sermon I want to share with you a few reasons why our understanding of the Trinity is at the very foundation of our Christian faith. First, **in the doctrine of the Trinity it becomes clear that God is truly the living God.** He is the God who has life in himself, He is full of life. And God came to us in His Son, Jesus Christ to give us life: abundant life, eternal life. Second, **our understanding of the Trinity helps us understand the doctrine of creation.** Theologian Emil Brunner once said, "The world as creation is the work of his love." It is through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, that God reached out to create a world. And what God made was something other than himself, and yet He is the foundation and He is its aim. Third, **a belief in the Trinity is important for the doctrine of revelation.** As a matter of fact it is the basis for all revelation.

Let me explain- it is in the revelation of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit that we not only receive some external information about God, but we have an assurance that God Himself is speaking to us and opening up His heart to us. And finally, **the doctrine of the Trinity is important to our salvation**. Because, when you think about it, the creating work of the Father, the divinity of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit are crucial to the church and to the church's witness.

The best I have been able to come up with to describe the Holy Spirit is this way- first you have water. Then you take that water and you boil it- the steam is still water. Then you take water and you freeze it to form ice, it is still water. Water, steam, ice. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Think of it this way: God above us = Father, God with us = Jesus, God within us = Holy Spirit. Don't give up trying to understand the mystery of the Trinity.

For as we sing in the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy"- "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God
almighty, All thy works shall praise thy name, in heaven and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty; God in three persons, blessed Trinity."

Let us stand and together and recite the Creed which came into being
in 325 A.D. after debating the doctrine of the Trinity. That Creed is the
Nicean Creed. Please join me....

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Introduction: Trinity Sunday...

What is the Trinity?

Within the Godhead there are 3 "persons" who are neither 3 Gods nor 3 parts of God, but they are _____ and _____ God

Bud Abbott and Lou Costell explain the Trinity...

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Other passages: Matt. 3:16-17; Matt. 28:19; Luke 1:35; Hebrews 9:14

Reasons why our understanding of the Trinity is at the very foundation of the Christian faith:

First, **in the doctrine of the Trinity it becomes clear that God is truly the _____ God**

Second, ... **it helps us understand the doctrine of _____**

Third, **a belief in the Trinity is important for the doctrine of _____**

Finally, ... **it is important to our _____**

Conclusion: God above=_____, God with=_____,
God within=_____