

A Sermon Preached Trinity Weekend, 2016
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, Creve Coeur MO
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It's Trinity Sunday, a day the church sets aside each year to restate and reinforce a central belief in the Christian church, dating back to church council meetings held about sixteen hundred years ago.

The Doctrine of the Trinity is one that was devised, primarily by trial and error, over three hundred years after Jesus walked the earth. Theologians were working out ways to explain the divinity of Jesus, his relationship to God, and his connection to the Holy Spirit.

At these gatherings, church leaders, and political leaders, would argue over the finer points of the nature of the three components of the Trinity. For example, whether or not Jesus was IN God, or OF God – knowing that the use of the wrong word just might get you beheaded for heresy.

At the time, even after 300 years, it was still a relatively new religion, and was in need of a unifying and unilateral telling of itself. There were already multiple versions of Christianity wandering around, the remnants of which can still be seen in Orthodox, Celtic, and Roman branches of the church.

Was Jesus a prophet, like Isaiah? Was he like one of the seven sages in the Hindu religion? Was he God? Or maybe he was A God – like Zeus? Was the Holy Spirit that descended upon Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist one of the same spirits that hovered over the waters of creation, written about in Jewish scriptures thousands of years earlier?

It was important, at the time, to settle it once and for all. To establish and teach this new revelation of God in Jesus in clear, distinct voice. One in 3. 3 in one. God the creator, God's son Jesus, the man, our redeemer, and the holy spirit, sent by Jesus after his resurrection as an advocate – as a sustainer, one who brings us peace.

It was still the beginning. They needed to explain themselves and this new faith with clarity and authority.

When I was earning my degree in education, we were asked to read a book called “Don't Smile Until Christmas.” A book written for teachers, emphasizing the importance of laying the groundwork for rules, order, and expectation in a classroom up front, with clarity and authority, and holding a strong party line until after the winter holidays. At that point, you could actually start to relax and enjoy your students. You hear a similar phenomenon in families with many children. The parents report being much more strict and cautions with their first children, not just to convince them of the rules, but I think also to convince themselves that they're up for the job – but by the time the third and fourth child comes along, they are able to relax and be the family they are meant to be.

When I suggested at seminary that perhaps the doctrine of the trinity was limiting our experience of God, whom I found manifest far beyond the descriptors of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I thought I saw a glimmer in the professor's eye, thinking about the guillotine gathering dust in the teacher's lounge.

But overall, as Christians, now that we're mostly settled on the larger doctrinal points, we have also relaxed a little in the language we use to explore our faith, our rules, and how to be the family we are meant to be. It's been awhile since anyone has been beheaded for using the wrong participle when describing God, and we are allowed to push back, to ask questions, to perhaps mentally insert an asterisk in a couple of parts of the creed, understanding in the Episcopal church anyway, that we are made stronger by asking questions, and beholding the new things God brings to us. We've come a long way.

At some point most of us were taught to think about the doctrine of the trinity, this triune nature of God, 3 in one, one in 3, as being like water, ice, and steam. Three very different manifestations of essentially the same combination of Hydrogen and Oxygen, And we nod our head and say yes, thanks, that helps.

But I believe there are more – many more – manifestations of the power of God, the Grace of God, the character of God coursing through the people, systems, places and transitions of our lives. I can stick with the hydrogen and oxygen combination, but will go a little further. The mystery of God was revealed to me in a blinding san Francisco fog; the terror and awe of God in the force of an undertow pulling me out to sea; the silence of God in the hush of snowflakes, crystal patterns illuminating midnight asphalt, on an impossibly cold Chicago silent night. And I have shared in Gods suffering, and known God's heart of compassion, kissing the tears from my son's face.

In our lives, God continues to push through, literally and figuratively flooding our basements with change, pattering on our rooftops with hopes of a new spring, of living water; reminders that we may not thirst again.

Here at St. Timothy's, with God's help, we have turned water into potatoes to feed the hungry, into coffee to share over conversations and prayers – holding each other in joy and sadness, watered flowers into a garden of prayer and memory. We will splash about in the baptismal font with Avery this morning, and all of us will be cleansed, to begin again.

It is in that spirit, and the spirit of continuing to seek and to find, with our words, this fountain of God, so we may share our faith with others, with clarity, authority, and distinction, that I wish you all a blessed Trinity, in the name of God, creator, redeemer and sustainer. *Amen.*