

## “Trinity: Life Together”

*1 John 4:7-21*

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Today is Trinity Sunday—the only Sunday in the entire Christian calendar that is devoted to the celebration of a doctrine. When I preached for the call here at OPC some people told me they wanted doctrinal preaching. So today is the perfect Sunday. Trinity Sunday is the church’s attempt to give content, substance and understanding to the word “God.” Yet Trinity also perplexes most Christians: three in one, one in three. British mystery writer and religious playwright, Dorothy Sayers wrote concerning the Trinity: “The Father is incomprehensible, the Son is incomprehensible, the whole thing is incomprehensible. Something put in place by theologians to make it more difficult—nothing to do with daily life or ethics.”

What do you think? Is she right? While it is true, that you won’t find the word Trinity anywhere in the whole Bible. Yet as our reading today shows the idea of God coming to us in three persons **is** indeed very biblical. There are numerous places where, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are spoken of together. Trinity was merely a doctrine that aimed at shedding light on something that is clearly there.

So does Trinity really matter, anyway? Yes, absolutely! Trinity is part of the core character and nature of God. To see this nature revealed we look at the actions of Jesus. And in Jesus’ life we see this kind of Tri-unity dance that is going on between the three persons of God. At Jesus’ baptism and again on the Mount of Transfiguration we hear the voice of the Father, saying look at the Son, look at the Son. Then we hear Jesus always saying, “Look at the Father—it’s not about me, it’s about doing the Father’s will. And then we see the Holy Spirit saying, Look at the Son, look at the Son,” teaching and reminding us of Jesus’ words. So do you see what’s happening? The Father says: “Look at the Son.” The Son says, “Look at the Father.” And the Spirit says: “Look at the Son.” They all humbly defer to each other in this circle of grace harmony and that we see as this divine interdependent community of love. Thus we hear 1 John say to us today: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” And, “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” God is three yet one, so in parallel Paul describes the church as having many members, but made one body in Christ through love for each other.

So what I want you to remember today is that to believe in Trinity is for us to live the Trinity. To live the Trinity is to be part of a life of agape love, together. That’s what we hear in 1 John 4: God is love and we see that love demonstrated in the unity and interdependence of this dance between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This very love shared within the Trinity and

brought into the world by Jesus is the very same merciful and gracious love that is meant to be shared, demonstrated and offered to others in and through the church.

The implications of this are significant. To become like Jesus—who is like the Father—I can't merely live by myself or live for myself. Christianity must always be lived in community, as Trinity is community. Consumerism trains us to come to church and say, "What's in this for me, what do I get?" Consumerism is always making life about my wants, my needs, my opinions, and getting what I want. Christianity is more like JFK's well known words—applied to the church, "Ask not what your church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your church." The church is about pouring ourselves out for each other and for the life of the world. Trinity means that Christianity is about learning to get out of ourselves and care for one another. It's when this happens that Jesus is present. In Matthew 18:20 (Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them) Yale theologian, Miroslav Volf says: "Christ's presence is promised not to the believing individual directly, but rather to the entire congregation, and only through the latter to the individual. This is why no one can come to faith alone and live in faith alone."

Life together in the community of the church is not an "optional" elective for keepers. Our life together as God's people is indispensable. Emil Brunner wrote: "The fellowship of Christians is just as much an end in itself as is their fellowship with Christ...in the supernatural life of the Christian communion is completed the revelation of the Triune God...the very being of God is agape." To believe in Trinity is to live the Trinity. To live the Trinity is to be part of the life together.

Some, when they think of seeing God in the world, think of being in the presence of a glorious Sunset, or at the birth of a child. But 1 John 4 says "no," that the Triune God is most clearly seen in the world when followers love each other as Christ loved us. The world is waiting to see the God who is Trinity **in our community**—in the way we care for each other, love each other, sacrifice for each other - come and see in us the glory of the God who is love. Just like Jesus, whose aim was to embody the Father's will, our call is the same. Our lives lived in interdependent community are to depict the life of God: which is love that is given away.

The Church has many different depictions of the Holy Trinity. But the most universally known is this one by Andrei Rublev from the 1300s, a masterpiece of Orthodox iconography. The icon is based on the appearance of the three strangers, (the three persons of God) in the form of three travellers to Abraham and Sarah under the oak of Mamre.

Notice what is at the centre of this icon. Not the three Divine figures. No, it's the chalice of wine - the cup. Why would that be? That cup is also at the centre of our life together. It symbolizes the poured-out blood of Christ, the sacrificial ministry to people; this is our true focus. That

cup, and this cup (*point to the Table*) is meant to remind us that the centre of any transforming Communion is not Communion itself, but the sacrificial love that results from it. That is the true character of the Communion of God for which our souls are restless, to which we are invited, and in which life is found. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins...We love because he first loved us." When the Father asked the Son to sacrifice his life in love, he said YES. When Jesus asks you to sacrifice something of yourself for this community, what will you say? When you say YES, the community becomes the witness. The community that pours itself out together to a needy world, is the most effective witness to the presence of God in the world.

Worship is entering into the fellowship of the Trinity. And notice in the icon that this is not a closed circle, there is a spot available at the table for you or me. We too are invited to come and offer ourselves in sacrificial love. Acts of sacrificing ourselves for others - put us in the presence of Jesus. Acts of sacrificial love require something of us, cause us to re-examine our priorities because it forces us to do without something important to us. This is not just a life of interaction, but of interdependence. Romans 12 says: "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). Togetherness is not a secondary aside - it is integral to our being saved. Our membership as Christians is not to an institution, but to one another. Volf describes this as "those who have been embraced by God in the fellowship of the Trinity and have had their old **self-centred** nature 'crucified with Christ'" (Gal. 2:19-20) are now able to demonstrate through their lives the presence of the God whose essence is the dance of Love (1 John 3:16) Finding ourselves affirmed and approached by God, we are inspired to leave self-centredness behind and enter the fellowship constituted by the Triune God, expressing our spirituality in sacrificial, self-giving love.

What do you think of my coffee mug? I got it one Christmas. It keeps coffee hot longer than any other travel mug I have ever had. But that's not what makes it so valuable to me. With my old mug I was forever spilling it on my clothes or on the car; what an annoying mess. But this coffee mug has that covered. It is sealed unless I press the button. No more spills. But that is not why this mug means so much to me. It means so much because it was a Christmas gift from someone who took the last \$30 that they had and, like the widow's offering in the temple, sacrificed it for me. Every drink is a challenge: Can you do better than live your life for yourself - can you live in sacrificial love toward others?