

# Trinity = Community

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### Lauren Chance Boyd, MDiv

When I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What do you mean when you say God? Who do you pray to? Who do you think about?

For some of us, Jesus is the easiest concept. If I had a nickel for every time someone said, "I don't like the God of the OT, but I do love Jesus", I'd be a millionaire. Jesus is relatable. Jesus is loving and kind.

Some of us relate to God the Father. We have or had a loving Father who requires much of us. We don't always live up to his expectations, but he loves us anyway. We have a firm understanding of God the Father's love and rules. Recently, one of our parishioner's told me: Rules without Relationship equals Rebellion and Relationship without Rules equals Chaos. God the Father gave us the Rules. Jesus gave us the relationship. So that's all we need right?

Well last week, I taught Vacation Bible School for 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Wow, I was really not cut out for that. It was enlightening however and as Judy noted I quickly began calling them "my kids." Throughout the week, they talked about "Jesus AND God." It drove me crazy! Jesus AND God? When I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit! What is this Jesus AND God thing? Surely they meant the Father and the Son, but that's not what we teach our children. We talk about Jesus this nice relatable guy who loves them. We also talk about God – who watches over them and maybe we hold the "mean" God over their heads a bit.

Having a 3 year old, I understand not wanting to explain the Trinity to him. It's a bit confusing – there's one God, but 3 persons? Even a 3 year old knows that math doesn't make sense.

But at some point, we all need to understand THE Primary Doctrine of Christianity. At some point, we should all confidently be able to say: when I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This Sunday is Trinity Sunday. It hasn't always been Trinity Sunday. In 1162, an Anglican Priest consecrated the Sunday after Pentecost as Trinity Sunday. Thank goodness he did, because we are forced to talk about it! Before 1162, the Trinity was taught through song and prayer but not "discussed at length." Father Thomas Becket made it a part of our yearly liturgical calendar and for that I'm glad. In fact, we sing about the Trinity every Sunday in the Doxology and in

songs such as “Holy, Holy, Holy” – remember “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”

If you look in your bulletin, you’ll see a diagram. It is a diagram of the Trinity. It shows the 3 persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit and says “they are one God” but it also makes it clear that they are separate. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. They are separate persons, but all connected as one God.

Confused? Me too. Here’s the history and I’ll make it fast: after Pentecost the Christian Community wanted to know what happened and who they were following. An early church father named Tertullian came up with the term “Trinity” and the early church spent the next 200 years arguing – YES – arguing about the meaning of this word.

Some well-meaning people said – there clearly are 3 gods. Some said – there is 1 God and Jesus is the son of God NOT God. Some even said – there is 1 God who wears different hats – like I’m Lauren – I’m a Christian who serves a church, I’m a mother and I’m an American. So God wears the Father hat sometimes and the Son hat sometimes and the Holy Spirit hat sometimes. This may make sense to you, but let’s talk about why it doesn’t work during Fall Bible Studies!

None of these theories made perfect sense though and so they became known as heresies. In fact, many of these well-meaning people were labeled heretics and even killed.

Not a great, touchy-feely story of the early church, but true nonetheless.

So here’s what they did decide and I’ve got to say – it makes as much sense as anything else...

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, our early church fathers came up with the Nicene Creed. Go ahead and take out your hymnal – turn to page 880. You may follow along if you like.

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.”

Cool?

“We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third

day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

Ok, that's a lot. Let's break it down a bit. The early fathers believed Jesus was “eternally begotten, not made” which means Jesus was not a created being of God the Father, but rather came from the Father. They proclaimed Jesus was there in the beginning when the world was created. As the Book of John states, Jesus was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us – that's what incarnate means, word made flesh. Keep a finger on the Nicene Creed, but flip over to Hark the Herald Angels Sing #240. Look at the 2nd verse... See, we sing about it occasionally, but did you catch all that? They proclaimed in the Creed and later in this song that Jesus was fully human as to be born a human child and yet fully divine so as to save us. Then they stated that once Jesus was resurrected “he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.” Ok, so the next part...

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”

So we have yet to mention the Holy Spirit. Our children comfortably speak of Jesus and we adults often speak of God. But what about the Holy Spirit? You may have heard me talk about the divine tag-team of Jesus ascending and the Holy Spirit descending. Last week, Pastor John preached about the Holy Spirit's descent among us. We sang phrases like, “breathe on me, breath of God” and “Holy Spirit rain down.” The Holy Spirit is what is with us now. It is the person of the Trinity who is inside of us.

Check out the UMC logo with the cross and flame. What's the flame? It's the Holy Spirit. John Wesley was really into the Holy Spirit and how it lives in us. He spoke of the Holy Spirit as a tiny light inside of all of us, like a pilot light. When we are baptized it turns into a spark and as we grow in our faith it grows inside of us as a flame.

I don't know if you've noticed, but two of our children's choirs are named Spark and Flame. That is no accident.

The Holy Spirit is the person of God who is with us NOW!!!!

It's important to give the Holy Spirit it's due. The church fathers proclaimed that the Holy Spirit moved in and through the Father and the Son.

The term “persons” may give you heartburn, but it's the word they used in the 4th century to say God has 3 distinct characters that aren't different hats, but distinct persons. Look again at the diagram. When I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is one God, but with 3 distinct persons.

All three persons were there in the beginning and are with us now, but who's inside of us – the Holy Spirit.

How do we describe this to our kids?

Well, you'll have to ask Judy about that.

Ok, let's look at one last part of the Nicene Creed.

"We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

The holy catholic "with a small C" church means – the church universal. The Community. The Trinity in and of itself is community. In fact, the Trinity models the perfect community for us. The persons of the Trinity are vastly diverse and yet are one God. We are a vastly diverse congregation in every sense of the word, yet we are called to be one. We are called to be one community in Christ.

Last week, Pastor John talked about Pentecost, the very birth of the church when the Holy Spirit descended. The Holy Spirit didn't come with a gale force wind for just one person – it was experienced by many witnesses. The Holy Spirit came to a group of individuals and FORMED a community.

There's a reason that we baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through our baptism we become a part of a community. With the expectation that the community will offer us love as God does, offer us grace as Christ does and abide with us as the Holy Spirit does. Without community, the fullness of God cannot be experienced. And when I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now the passage Jenell read, ends 2 Corinthians with a big bow - be at peace, get along, be of one mind and then ends with the Trinitarian benediction. What she didn't read is how Paul is writing to the church in Corinth for the ump-teen time and is furious with them for a variety of things.

The Bible Translation from The Message says in its intro: "The Corinthian Church gave their founding pastor, Paul, more trouble than all his other churches put together. No sooner did Paul get one problem straightened out in Corinth than three more appeared. For anyone operating under the naïve presumption that joining a Christian church is a good way to meet all the best people and cultivate smooth social relations, a reading of Paul's Corinthian correspondence is the prescribed cure. But however much trouble the Corinthians were to each other and to Paul, they prove to be a cornucopia of blessings to us, for they triggered some of Paul's most profound and vigorous writing!" He is scolding them for following other leaders and for their attitudes toward each other. I'm not saying this mirrors our church, but I think it's encouraging to know that even the very 1st churches weren't perfect!!! And more importantly, Paul ends the letter with "be at peace, get along, be of one mind" AND reminds them of the perfect community:

The Trinity.

And so it is my prayer that through all our differences and peculiarities – our pasts, our struggles, our pride, our political stances, our hopes, our histories with each other – through all of that – that we can come together as the community that God is calling us to be. One that loves God and loves and supports each other.

Now let us stand together and sing...