

Welcome to Holy Trinity Sunday. This is unique Sunday in the church calendar. As the only Sunday that centers around a theological concept or doctrine, it stands apart. To be fair, it's doctrine that we are reminded of every Sunday by the Liturgy, because it's doctrine that sits at the center of our faith as Christians. Every Sunday we repeat it, we proclaim it (as we will again today in just a few minutes) when we recite the Creed. We believe in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit - not as three separate gods, but as one God in three persons.

Holy Trinity Sunday comes hot on the heels of Pentecost Sunday, and I there really isn't a better time for it. For the Spirit has just come and in dramatic fashion: Tongues of fire, violent winds, and the hearing of native languages in the speaking of tongues. This Spirit becomes on Pentecost Sunday an active, surprising and consequential identity in the activity of God. And while we've spent the weeks of Easter (along with most other weeks) completely engrossed in Jesus and the God whom he has "made known," we are left (even after Pentecost Sunday) with two questions: Who is this Holy Spirit? And how is this Spirit also God?

These are the questions we will be looking at this Holy Trinity Sunday.

We'll make our way back to the Pentecost story of last Sunday - the big reveal of the Spirit. But this Spirit has been part of the story from the very beginning. At the very start of creation itself, "when God created the heavens and the earth," we read that "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." That Hebrew word for wind is *ruach*, which also means *breath* and *spirit*. So it is that we meet the Spirit at the very start of all that is - as participating with God in creating.

Starting with creation, this Spirit becomes a thread that weaves in and out of the Hebrew scriptures in different forms and by different names. But I want to fast forward to the New Testament, to the baptism of Jesus. This is a story told in all four gospels. Each telling is different but one thing is shared by all - the presence of the Spirit descending on Jesus.

The synoptic gospels (M.M.L.) share another element around Jesus' baptism - the voice saying "You are my son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased." This fits with what we read in Romans today. Paul tells us that it is through the Spirit that we are children of God, and that it is a "Spirit of adoption" by which we are freed from slavery and fear, and claimed by God as "joint heirs with Christ."

With all this in the background we look to our gospel reading, hearing Jesus say, "I will not leave you orphaned." The Advocate, he calls it, from God, will be with you. "You know this Spirit," he tells the disciples, "because [it] abides with you, and [it] will be in you." It "will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." So "do not let your hearts be troubled."

It seems the Spirit is concerned primarily with creating connection. Jesus tells the disciples, “You know this Spirit” - it’s familiar, literally family. It will be near to them, “abiding” with them and even “in them,” adopted by the Spirit as Paul says: In that abiding, the Spirit leads us and makes us children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. The Spirit is weaving familial connection.

Do you hear your own baptism in there? We are called and brought to baptism by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit with the water that God gives God’s daughters and sons new birth, cleanses us from sin and raises us to eternal life. And it is by the Spirit that we are sealed and marked with the cross of Christ forever. And bringing it back to Romans, It is by the Spirit that we are made God’s own, beloved children, with Christ, in whom God is well pleased.

We saw this connecting Spirit at work on Pentecost Sunday: The languages, the intimate “mother tongues” spoken by the disciples “as the Spirit gave them ability,” drawing together native speakers. The displacement of each culture (with its own language) was common practice by Rome as it conquered new territories - dispersing people throughout the empire to keep cultural/lingual connections from turning into resistance or even rebellion. But the Spirit comes and, in the voices of the disciples, tears away the isolation, the division felt by their listeners. It reached across all that separated them to be heard, to connect people with Jesus’ followers, and even to connect them with their places of origin.

This is the work of the Spirit: The connector element of God’s identity in the Trinity.

The Trinity: “God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit - God as three persons, but one being.” I read in a few places this week that our trinitarian understanding of God was an early answer to the question of Jesus’ relationship to God. This question was the center of the debate at the First Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. It wasn’t until the end of the 4th century that the Creed developed at that council was expanded to include the Holy Spirit.

The Nicene Creed is the creed we have used for the season of Easter the last two years. It shares a similar form but is rather different from the Apostle’s Creed that we use the rest of the year. One primary difference is the way Jesus and the Holy Spirit are described. Jesus, as “eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, of one Being with the Father.” And 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.”

The Trinity was no simple issue. Uniting the Church under one understanding of God was critical in these first centuries after Christ. But in the end, all these centuries later, the history of how the church “worked out” its understanding of God as a Trinity can obscure what the Trinity actually means. And what it means is that *relationship* sits at the heart of how we understand God.

Whether we think of God by name (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) or by the distinct work they do (Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer), what matters is that we have a God who is not satisfied with creating alone. For God so loved the world that God came close, came into the world to be touched, seen, felt and ultimately known through Jesus. We have a God that wasn’t satisfied to be known by only one generation, by only those who knew Jesus in one time and place. So God came in the Spirit, coming close again and again to be felt and heard and known across all time and space.

God is and wants relationship.

Do you feel that? Have you ever felt it? The closeness of God through the Spirit? It's sometimes a hard thing to identify in the moment, but you look back over your life and you can see perhaps a small collection of moments when the Spirit came close and that connection was made.

I've told you about having left the church for a time in my 20s, eventually returning, and being utterly overwhelmed at those first church services - balling through the liturgy and the hymns without even understanding why!

I've told some of you about when I rejected prayer as part of my "leaving religion." When I eventually wanted to return to it, I was having some real difficulty, until I read a passage from Romans 8 (just a few verses after our reading today) - Verse 26: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

I'm sure many of you have experiences of being outside and feeling that connection, that closeness with God in wilderness. Even just walking outside into the sun after a rain - the damp, earthy smell of soil and trees and flowers in the air. Mountains in sight, deer contentedly munching your lawn after a long, lean winter. That feeling of connection, of "oneness," can surprise.

Or maybe it's an experience of being with someone at their bedside in their dying - that's a particular experience of the Spirit. At such times it might be the feel of being held, whether in grief, in relief, or in anger. The Spirit attends to us in death - our own and that of others. It can be hard to see in the moment, but the closeness of God through the Spirit as last breaths are taken is real.

In all this though, what's revealed to me about the Trinity, about the connection the Spirit seems so intent on making against all odds, is that perhaps it's not about relationship per se, or even connection, but communion.

I'm not talking about the meal now. I'm talking about the union we sometimes get a taste of, the union that seems to be the project of the Spirit's coming last week in fire, wind, and mother tongue. I'm talking about the feeling of being seen, in all our brokenness, and loved/accepted anyway. I'm talking about the welcome that is our call and the way we can reach out of ourselves and our solitary comfort to greet someone and introduce ourselves. The kind of connection that can be made out there when the conversation quiets, a longing is heard, and an invitation to church kind of tumbles out. Maybe they don't come that next Sunday, but a seed's been planted.

Communion is what the Spirit's after. It's got no patience for division or the things that get in the way between us. But it's not just communion between people. The Spirit is the part of God that seeks to sweep us up into union with this triune God. This three-fold God seeks not to be removed and alone, it seeks to involve you in the work of God gathering up all people and all creation in its trinitarian dance of making one that which has been torn apart - making whole what has been rendered.

The longing we know at times in life (for healing, for relief, for assurance) hides the Spirit's tug from within, reminding you of what Jesus has made known to you - that this God seeks union with you and with all creation so much that this God came into creation itself, suffered its worst punishments, rose again, and having reconciled all things to himself, sent the Spirit to keep gathering in the lost and the lonely, the fearing and despairing.

I was being gathered back into God, into the church, into this communion.

## Communion

This is not a math problem - approaching the Trinity with an analytical gaze is a good and noble thing, but obscures the opportunity we have to discover what the Trinity means...

Spirit, Joining. Primary activity of Spirit -  
Language of Children/adoption/heirs in Romans through the Spirit  
Advocate, not orphaned.

Spirit of Truth - she will be in you

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Jennings:

“A community broken open by a sheer act of God 27

God acts and is acting to break us open. Indeed it will be a community  
created by the Spirit precisely in the breaking open 28

Joining

Wild, untamed, unwanted etc. 28 Our struggle to yield to the Spirit 7  
God working toward the good in the midst of pain4

Joins us in time p4

Consciousness, the soul, love, the Holy Spirit, on both the individual and shared levels, have sadly become largely *unconscious*! No wonder some call the Holy Spirit the “missing person of the Blessed Trinity.” No wonder we try to fill this *radical disconnectedness* through various addictions.

There is an Inner Reminder and an Inner *Rememberer* (see John 14:26, 16:4) who holds together all the disparate and fragmented parts of our lives, who fills in all the gaps, who owns all the mistakes, who forgives all the failures—and who loves us into an ever-deeper life. This is the job description of the Holy Spirit, who is the spring that wells up within us (John 7:38–39)—and unto eternal time. This is the breath that warms and renews everything (John 20:22). These are the eyes that see beyond the momentary shadow and disguise of things (John 9); these are the tears that wash and cleanse the past (Matthew 5:4). And better yet, they are not only *our* tears but are actually the very presence and consolation of God within us (2 Corinthians 1:3–5).

You must contact this Immensity! You must look back at what seems like your life from the place of this Immensity. You must know that this Immensity is already within you. The only thing separating you from such Immensity is your unwillingness to trust such an utterly free grace, such a completely unmerited gift.