

I count myself lucky, blessed in fact, to wake up nearly every morning happy about going to work. Now this happiness isn't just that I am able to work; this happiness is also because I have work that I enjoy and in which I find meaning. If I didn't need to be paid, much of what I do, I would do for free, I enjoy it that much. Some of what I get paid to do is to think about God. How cool is that? This Sunday, Trinity Sunday, is a morning set aside for us to think collectively about the nature of God and what that means to us. In other words, we all get to be armchair theologians this morning.

Of necessity, we quickly come to realize that we cannot hope to capture the reality of God in mere words. The best we can do is to speak poetically and metaphorically to capture some sense of God. Our concept of the Trinity is just such a metaphor, and there is no universal understanding of what we mean when we say the Trinity.

First, let's look at the problem the Doctrine of the Trinity is trying to solve. The Apostles and other early church leaders found that they worshiped Jesus. The word worship means "worthy of worship" and these early followers found Jesus "worthy of worship." Many of them were devout Jews. As devout Jews, they knew there was only one God and the first

commandment essentially says there is only one God and that is God. So is the worship of Jesus a violation of this commandment?

Wrestling with this question, led to new understandings of the meaning of messiah; and a growing realization that Jesus is both human AND divine. This concept is difficult enough to wrap our heads around. Suffice it to say that there were lots of arguments around Jesus is ONLY divine and didn't really suffer on the cross as well as Jesus is ONLY human and there was no resurrection. Then the discussions revolved around HOW Jesus can be both human and divine at the same time. Finally, the early church wrestled with how to capture their experience of the Holy Spirit. The Roman Emperor Constantine forced the church to work it out "once and for all" - and what emerged was the Nicene Creed in 381. Fundamentally, then, what Christians are trying to do when we talk about the Trinity is protect our idea of "one God," or monotheism.

The discussions and arguments about the nature of God didn't stop in 381, and the Doctrine of the Trinity didn't solve the matter "once and for all." In fact, the understanding of the Holy Spirit and her origins caused the first significant split in the universal church into Eastern and Western divides. Should our understanding of God be settled once and for all? I would

argue that the answer is “no.” I would further argue that I believe that God delights in our trying to understand the divine because in this trying to understand we are engaging with God and are in relationship with God. I would also argue that our understanding of God informs our actions and our behaviors in the world about us as well as our worship. So what we believe about God matters, both individually and corporately.

It would certainly help if the Trinity as such were specifically mentioned in Scripture. It isn't. The closest we come is Jesus' call to us to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.¹ This is not to say that Scripture leaves us clueless, it doesn't. As Christians we believe that the nature of God was definitively revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Muslims proclaim their commonality with us as “people of the book.” Muslims and Jews both believe that God is revealed in their respective Holy Scriptures. We believe, on the other hand, that our Holy Scriptures tell us about God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. Do you see the difference? We also believe that God is present and active in time and in history through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Matt 28:19

These beliefs then inform our behavior. It makes us take seriously what Jesus taught and how he understood the Hebrew Scriptures. It prompts us to emulate him in living out loving God and loving neighbor as well as share the Good News that God's will for us is life, not death. Our understanding of God also prompts our understanding of where God resides, is it "up there?" or is it "right here?"

Recently, many of us read together Grounded, by Diana Butler Bass. In that book she is trying to answer "Where is God?" and she says that this is "one of the most consequential questions of our times." She further states that the answer to this question in our time represents a spiritual revolution. In our post-Christian world, the answer to this question is that God is all around us, constantly present in the earth, in the air and in the water. If we understand God similarly, we then begin to see the interconnectedness of all things and so we become more conscious of how we engage with the created order, from what we drive, to how we travel, to what we eat and how we get it and so on.

Although she doesn't say so in her book, and I certainly haven't asked her (even though we are friends on Facebook) I think our passage from Proverbs resonates with her thesis. Here we have Lady Wisdom,

whom we understand as the Holy Spirit, present at creation, designing and delighting in all that God has made. Further, this feminine spirit delights with God in the human race. The English translation of the Hebrew gives us a sense of God's delight; however, it fails to give us the idea, as the Hebrew does, that God and Wisdom together are dancing and whirling through the creation process and that they continue to do so.² Lady Wisdom then is akin to a sprite, taking joy in all that God has created. Wisdom does not have to be somber and reflective, although there is certainly a place for sober reflection. Sometimes I can forget that there is wisdom in play, in dancing, and in taking delight in all there is. And then I remember that I love what I do, and that this is a gift from God. How I believe does indeed shape how I act in the world and in how I worship. And how **we** believe does too.

So take some time today to reflect on how you understand God and how we as a parish family understand God. How does this understanding shape your world view and your activity in the world? And if you have questions about the Trinity, ask those questions! If you ask these questions of me, I can point you in the direction of modern and ancient theologians

² Jeff Paschal, "Homiletical Perspective," *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 3* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2010, 31.

who have wrestled with these questions, too. Be brave and ask these questions or share your own reflections at coffee hour ... unless you want to turn to your neighbor and reflect on it right now?

I'll leave you with a thought about the Trinity to ponder... the Trinity not as a complex doctrine, but instead the basic things that God desires and wants for us.

God the creator is a God of community. God loves us to be together with all our differences and similarities gathered in community.

God the son, the Word made flesh is a God of conversation. God loves us to gather in conversation.

God the Holy Spirit is the God who made us the church. God loves us as we gather for the liturgy and worship.³

I invite you to be playful and enjoy God's delight in you as you ponder God.

AMEN.

³ The Rev George Wong, Trinity Sunday Sermon, 5/22/16.