

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Trinity Sunday, May 27, 2018.**

Trinity Sunday. One of my favorite Sundays. Always reminds me of growing up in the First Methodist Church in Pasadena, CA, and singing, as we did this morning, Holy, Holy, Holy.

A favorite also because on Trinity Sunday we don't play favorites. All three of the Divine dimensions receive their due - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and all at the same time. It's a party we throw for the whole Divine family.

We have twins in our family, but not triplets. When twins celebrate a birthday, families try hard not to play favorites and twins try hard not to sense any favoritism. I wonder though if this equal treatment is a greater challenge in the case of triplets.

This hypothetical applies this morning because, in our Christian Faith, we have triplets. God knows us in three ways, and we know God in three ways. Which raises the question: is there equity in how God knows us, and is there equity in how we know God. Is God slighting us in any way, and are we slighting God in any way?

I think the answer to the first question is that God doesn't slight. Rather God knows that as individuals we respond to different stimuli in different ways. We can be in awe of the Creation. We can be in awe of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And we can be in awe of the comfort of the Holy Spirit. And we can be in awe of the whole Divine package. God provides a menu, and is delighted when we choose any part of that menu or all of it.

If you think of this menu as a buffet, the main course might be the Creation. The smaller but more delectable section might be Jesus. And the dessert might be the Holy Spirit. And our selection might vary from occasion to occasion.

Which leads us to the second question: do we slight God in any way? Do we take advantage of the diverse menu, or do we stay with just one portion of that menu? Are we in awe of the Creation, but unsure about Jesus, and downright uncomfortable with the Holy Spirit? Or, is the combination always in flux?

My guess is that most of us are grateful for the whole package, but with a higher level of comfort and interest in one part of the package. For me, the Creation is awesome and the Holy Spirit is mysterious. From Isaiah (**Isaiah 6:1-8**): "Holy, holy,

holy is the Lord of hosts” – this is awesome - and “the whole earth is full of his glory” – this is mysterious.

Hard to get a handle on these Divine elements. It is Jesus therefore who gets most of my attention.

The combination of divinity and humanity in Jesus is really intriguing. Remember this verse from our gospel this morning (**John 3:1-17**): “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” This statement from Jesus doesn’t discourage me from wanting to know more, but encourages me. Jesus is challenging us both to think small and to think big. It’s this challenge that is appealing.

Your interests might be quite different. And that’s okay. That is probably why God reveals Himself to us in multiple ways. He honors our diversity by sharing His diversity.

Picture two rating cards: one for how God reveals Himself to you, and the other for how you respond to that revelation. The task for each card is to divide the whole – 100% - in three parts. For example, the God revealing Himself card might be 50% as Creator, 25% as Jesus, and 25% as Holy Spirit. For the second card, our receiving the revelation, the division might be 30% from Creation, 50% from Jesus, and 20% from Holy Spirit.

Yes, as an exercise, this borders on the simplistic. But it might also be helpful as we think about our faith. And that’s what I think this Sunday is really about. The Trinity makes us think. Three-in-One. How does this happen? Why does this happen? What does it mean that each card doesn’t show 33 1/3 % for each category? And what does it mean that there are categories at all?

Here’s a possibility. God wants to communicate with us and wants us to communicate with Him. God recognizes that we are different in our communication abilities and interests. So, God reveals Himself in a variety of ways, but never with so many ways, so many choices, that He discourages us from reaching out, reaching back to Him. Three categories, as an approach, apparently work for God, and they can work for us. It can be a beautiful relationship. Our individuality is honored by the Creator of the Universe. How incredible is that.

Today's Psalm (**Psalm 29**) is heavy on one of three dimensions of God. Look at the language: glory, strength, holiness, thunders, powerful, splendor, breaks, skips, splits, shakes, writhe. This is God the Father, the Creator, the One in Charge.

But notice how the Psalm ends: "the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace."

St. Paul in his letter to the **Romans (Romans 8:12-17)** addresses this "blessing of peace." "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption ..... we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."

The God of Creation, the first element of the Trinity, is also the God of suffering and salvation, the second element of the Trinity, all of which is delivered and kept alive by the third element of the Trinity, the Spirit of Adoption.

Too simple? Or, just right? That's the choice, isn't it? And maybe, just maybe, that's the greatest gift of all. From God, in His totality, we receive respect, not all in the same way, but in a manner that makes the most sense for us. The least we can do for this individualized sharing is return the respect.

In schools, individualized learning sometimes takes the form of an IEP, an individualized education program. It is teaching and learning that is tailored to the needs of the child. These programs save many kids from failure. Well, think of the Trinity as an IEP for all of us. God doesn't want us to struggle. He wants to save. And so He reaches out to us in a variety of ways, and we respond in a variety of ways. This is the Exchange that we honor on Trinity Sunday.

And we do so, this year, on Memorial Day Weekend, a time to remember those who have given their lives in the service of our country, the families impacted by these sacrifices, and all of us who benefit. Our unshakable conviction is that the God we honor today, and every time we gather, is the same God who, in this life and the next, looks after those who sacrifice their lives for others.

To these heroes and to their God and our God, the One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we offer today a very big "Thank you." Amen.

