



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road  
roswell, georgia 30076

03-Jun-2007 Trinity Sunday

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 8 John 16:12-15

**SERMON:** Blessed Trinity (Rev. Brent Anderson)

#### **INTRODUCTION: THE APOSTLES' CREED**

Every Sunday, as part of our worship, we say the Apostles' Creed as an affirmation of our faith.

*"I believe in God the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord."*

We say this every Sunday. And yet there is something about that has always bothered me a little bit. If it lacks anything... it lacks a decent description of the work of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever noticed that?

It's interesting how this creed develops. It talks about God the father and it describes God in powerful terms: God is almighty. God created heaven and earth. It describes the transcendent God who is above us; who made us and everything in our world, everything that is seen and everything that is unseen.

Then it immediately jumps to the Son.

*"I believe in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he was raised from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."*

That's a pretty thorough description of the Son. It walks us through his entire life, work and ministry. It describes as succinctly as it can the God who is near... the God who is with us and for us.

#### **THE SHORT END – THE HOLY SPIRIT**

But notice what happens when the creed gets to the Holy Spirit. It simply says, *"I believe in the Holy Ghost."* And it's part of a larger list.

Is that all that the Apostles had to say about the Holy Spirit? They believe in it. What about the role the Holy Spirit plays in our world and in our lives? What about a description of the Holy Spirit, the God, who works in and among us; transforming us from the inside out and transforming the world around us?

It's like they don't know what to say and so they simply acknowledge that the Holy Spirit exists and then move on to other important beliefs of the church.

*"I believe in the holy ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."*

*Why is that?*

Now sure... to the person who was paying attention, we did hear that the Holy Spirit took part in the conception of Jesus; "*who was conceived by the holy ghost*". And it could be argued that what follows the mention of the Holy Spirit at the end of the creed could be tied to the work of the Spirit. But a rich description of the Spirit and the Spirit's role in our life and faith is somewhat absent here.

And as Presbyterians, that might be good. We get a little nervous when people talk too much about the Holy Spirit or claim to have "The spirit's power."

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Now you might be wondering why I have gone on and on about this. But today is Trinity Sunday. It is an important day in the life of the church. It is a day that celebrates not an event like Christmas or Easter or Pentecost, but a day that celebrates one of the most central doctrines of our faith.

### AFFIRMATION #1 – ONE GOD

The Ancient Israelites had their own version of the Apostles' Creed in Deuteronomy 6:4 called the Shema which said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one". This was what they said every time they gathered for prayer and worship. Like the Ancient Israelites, we believe that there is only one God. We are monotheists. We believe in only one God. We are not polytheists. We don't believe there are three Gods. But we believe there is one God, who is revealed in three persons: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is a unity, but there is also a trinity.

So the first thing we affirm in the doctrine of the trinity is that we believe in *one* God!

### AFFIRMATION #2 – THREE PERSONS

The second thing that we affirm in the doctrine of the trinity is that this one God lives and works in three different ways at the same time; one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just like the song that we sang earlier... *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God almighty... God in three persons, blessed trinity.*

This is where the confusion comes in. When we say God in three persons, we don't mean three gods. We don't even mean three distinct and separate people in the sense of being three individuals each doing a job cut off and separate from one another. Instead, we mean that we experience God in three distinct ways, in three interrelated, interconnected persons who are all equal with one another; who are all fully and equally God.

### TESTING THE TRI-UNITY OF GOD

I would ask... *do we really believe this?* Do we really believe that Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Son of God is just as equally and fully God as God the father? Do we believe that the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the father and the son, is just as equally and fully God as God the Father and God the Son. Or do we believe that some members of the trinity are less important or less divine than the others?

I think a lot of us fall into the trap of thinking that some of the members of the trinity are subordinate to others or can be separated from the others.

For example, when we pray, is it appropriate to pray to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus, or should we always direct our prayers to God? Some say we should only pray to God... but if Jesus and the Holy Spirit are fully God, *isn't praying to one of them the same as praying to God?*

When we think of one God, do we think of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or do we think of the Father who is the "*main*" God who sits alone at the top of our trinity triangle with the other two members of the trinity resting in the corners beneath him? This is *NOT* what the doctrine of the trinity affirms. God the Father is *not* above God the Son or God the Holy Spirit.

Do we believe that Jesus is fully God? We know that he prayed to God; he relied on God; he was completely obedient to God; he was fully human. But we also believe that he was God in the flesh; he was God. *Did his full humanity make him a little less than God?*

Do we believe that God the father and God the son think the same? When we read a lot about God the father, we see that God the father is an angry God who wants to punish us. But what we read about Jesus is that Jesus loves us and took God's punishment on himself, so God had to let us go free. So isn't it true that God the father is a judging God and God the son is a loving God? *Not at all.* Jesus is the deepest expression of God. *"For God so loved the world that he sent his only son"* - John 3:16. What God the father wills is what Jesus wills. What Jesus wills is what God the father wills.

### AFFIRMATION #3 – INDIVISIBLE

This takes us to our third affirmation of the trinity. This is an important one. The third thing that we need to affirm about the trinity is that the three persons are inseparable.

Now, here is where it gets good. These three experiences of God do not take away the Oneness of God; Rather they point to the *mystery of God's full being*. Throughout history the church has come to confess that God is both One *and* Three – one person who is known in three ways.

This does not mean that these three persons exist in some separate space or entity of their own, or that God has sequentially put on three different hats. Rather, it means that each of the three persons expresses the wholeness of God.

Shirley Guthrie has a good description of what we mean when we say that the persons of the trinity are inseparable or indivisible. He says:

*"We might associate different works with the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, but we cannot separate them. What one wills and does, the other two will and do also. We never have to do with one without the other two. Where one is at work, there the other two are at work also, and the purpose and goal of any one is the same as the purpose and goal of the other two... For God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three different Gods willing and doing three different things. They are one God who in three different ways wills and does the same thing..."*

*We may distinguish between God's work as Creator and Ruler of the world; as Reconciler, Liberator, and Savior of needy, sinful human beings; and as Renewer and Transformer of the life of human beings and all creation. But the will and work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be separated or set over against each other. They can be understood only in light of each other and in their agreement with each other, for Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God."*

### THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

The Trinity is one of the most difficult Christian doctrines to understand and to explain. How God can exist as one God in three persons is a mystery that cannot be explained as much as "confessed" and believed. At some point we all need to gladly acknowledge that there are things about God we will never "understand" or be able to "explain" – unless we want to bring God down to our size... a size that is simple, easy and manageable... or we intend to make God in our own image. But scripture affirms that God made us in God's image.

### THE MEANING FOR OUR LIVES

If God made us in God's image, the image of the trinity shows us that God is a relational being. Therefore, we must draw the conclusion that we too are relational beings. If God made us in God's image, the image of the trinity shows us that all three persons in the trinity are equal. Therefore, we must draw the conclusion that we too are all created equal.

## WE ARE RELATIONAL

Consider what this means for the church. This doctrine teaches us that life at its core is relational because God's very being is a being-in-relationship. If God is indeed Three in One... a collective, a person in relationship, *a being in communion himself*—all three persons relating to each other in divine love; in a mutual indwelling of divine love that characterizes their divine life... if God is three in one, then *our* life is also to be found in relationship and community.

*We need each other.* We are in it together and this togetherness needs to be celebrated. *God has made us in his own image* and that image is made up of a dynamic and dancing inner reality between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, so that when our relationships are restored with God, family, friends and ourselves, we are the most human and most fulfilled of all people in the world. Barbara Streisand used to sing: "People, who need people, are the luckiest people in the world?" No, we are not just the luckiest, *but the most human and fulfilled people in the world!*

## WE ARE EQUAL

If God made us in God's image and God's image shows us that all three persons of the trinity are all equally God... that there is no hierarchy in God, then we too are all created equal and we should treat one another that way. We are all God's creation. We may have different gifts, but we are all equal. *But do we live in our churches, in our communities and schools, in our society that way?*

Perhaps our equality is most evident when we come to this meal and to this table. Who are we to exclude anyone from this table? This is the Lord's Table. No one is deserving of this meal. No one has earned the right to be here at this table, yet the Lord offers it to us *in divine love*.

*Imagine our church, imagine our world if we truly believed that we need one another, that we're all in this together, and that we are all equals and think of the work that is before us, the changes that need to be made to bring this about! Amen.*

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### Psalm 8

1O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. 2Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. 3When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; 4what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? 5Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. 6You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, 7all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, 8the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. 9O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

### John 16:12-15

12"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

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