

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TRINITY SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on II Corinthians 13)*

One: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us worship God,
Three in One,

All: One in Three.

One: Holy Trinity.

All: Holy Mystery.

***OPENING HYMN** “Come, Thou Almighty King” GtG 2

1. **Come, thou almighty King,
help us thy name to sing;
help us to praise:
Father, all glorious,
o'er all victorious,
come, and reign over us,
Ancient of Days.**
2. **Come, thou incarnate Word,
merciful, mighty Lord,
our prayer attend.
Come, and thy people bless,
and give thy word success;
Spirit of holiness,
on us descend.**

(continued...)

3. **Come, holy Comforter,
thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour.
Thou who almighty art,
now rule in every heart,
and ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of power.**

4. **To thee, great One in Three,
eternal praises be,
hence evermore!
Thy sovereign majesty
may we in glory see,
and to eternity
love and adore.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Ever-present God, we have ignored your presence and denied your power.
We have doubted rather than trusting you. We have complained when we should
have celebrated. We have pursued private agendas while you summon us to
community concern. We have kept our faith to ourselves when you call us to share
good news. Forgive our unfaithfulness, O God, and enable us to mend our ways.
Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we are forgiven and freed.
Claim your forgiveness.
Rejoice in God's grace.
Respond with love.

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also with you.

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod
of the head, etc.)*

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Genesis 1:1-5
Matthew 28:16-20

GENESIS 1:1-5 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

MATTHEW 28:16-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

Trinity.

Perhaps you've heard it as part of a name: Trinity Church.

Or a reference to a group of three closely-related things: a trinity of ideas, or heads of state.

Or you've noted its reference in the soon-to-be-released "Oppenheimer" film: "Trinity" – the code name for the first detonation of a nuclear weapon. (That's ominous!)

But today is Trinity...Sunday.

Trinity: a term used to refer to the Christian belief of 'God as one being existing as three persons'.

Not a word we often use in daily conversation.

And when it is used, there can be some resistance to its use, and perhaps with good reason.

"Trinity: there's that elitist word of high-falootin language, that includes phrases like 'of one essence' and 'very God of very God.' What does that even mean?"

Or the critique – or even accusation – that we're really talking about three different gods, not one.

But who cares?
And why should you?

To begin with, let's be clear: the word 'Trinity' never occurs in the Bible. Technically, the doctrine of the Trinity is not in the Bible.

Oh yes, there are numerous references to God as Father and Jesus Christ as Lord and the Spirit of God in the Bible. So we might say that the Trinity appropriately reflects biblical usage. But the clear working out of a belief in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "God in three persons, blessed Trinity"? – No.

That doctrine developed, over time, in the first few hundred years of the Christian church. And it's important to understand why.

And it really starts with Jesus.

Following his ministry, his death, and resurrection, the believers wrestled with their core understandings about Jesus. And they couldn't help but come to the conclusion that, despite his being truly a human being, like us, Jesus was, in some way, also truly God: no one else but God could have done what he did; no one else but God could bring about the restoration (reconciliation) with God that he did through his life, death, and resurrection.

But then mix in the experience of the believers from that first Pentecost (that we focused on last week): that something happened that they could only attribute to the Spirit of God working in their midst. But this experience of the Spirit of God seemed different, in some way from their experience of God in Jesus Christ: different, though also intimately related.

And remember these were Jewish believers in Jesus – followers of Jesus who were Jewish (they were not yet called, separately, 'Christians') – and they were, from their Jewish heritage and tradition, staunch monotheists: believers that there was only one God, as opposed to so many around them who believed in multiple gods. A heritage and tradition that lifted up God as the Creator of all there is, including us.

So, this tradition, this heritage, this history of God as One and God as Creator of the world ... collides with this experience of God in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ ... which collides with this experience of God in the movement of 'wind and fire', the Spirit working amongst the people.

Are we dealing with three separate gods with some sort of hierarchy amongst them? Has God changed roles and costumes, if you will, in God's relating to the world?

And why does it matter?

And people in the church wrestle with these questions and arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity: that God is One as Three 'Persons' in one, each 'Person' distinct, yet still (together) One.

And yes, when you say it like that, it might seem sort of silly, in its way.

But the intent is not silly.

The intent is serious.

The God we know of as the Creator of the universe, of all things large and small, including every single one of us ... is the same God we experience and come to know and come

in contact with and relate to in the person and work of this particular person named Jesus Christ ... is the same God we know and experience in the Spirit moving and working in us, infusing us with life and hope and purpose.

One God, not three different Gods.

Different – or should I say, varying – experiences of this same God affecting the world and others and me: as my Creator, and yours as well; as my Deliverer, and yours as well; as my Sustainer and Guide in life, and yours as well.

God as Creator and Provider is not somehow better, over and above God as Deliverer and Reconciler.

God as Deliverer and Reconciler is not somehow better, over and above God as Sustainer and Advocate.

God as Sustainer and Advocate is not somehow better, over and above God as Creator and Provider.

Our experiences of God may be different.

But it is the same God.

And in that simple, though complex, statement, the church affirms – and powerfully – the expansive nature of God’s engagement with us.

As Oliver Larry Yarbrough notes, regarding numerous ways Matthew describes God’s varying work,

[This] is not meant to suggest Matthew has a fully developed notion of the Trinity, but only that its author is aware of multiple ways God engages the world.... (Professor of Religion, Middlebury College, Vermont, in *Connections*, “Connecting the Reading with Scripture,” p.15)

“Multiple ways God engages the world.”

How marvelous!

An affirmation of God’s wondrous working with you and me and the world. Indeed, a commitment to seeing God’s expansive, diverse working with you and me and the world.

To declare that God is so expansive, and God’s work is so great and vast and wondrous with you and me and others and the world, that we cannot begin to think we can contain this notion and this vision and this working of God.

So why do we try? But we do. We try to keep God under wraps, keep God to ourselves; keep God in a box, under our control.

And God is not.

Try to nail God down as the Creator of the universe (big enough as that is), and God surprises us by caring so much for us that God comes to us as the Deliverer: not only delivering us from all that threatens and seeks to squelch and diminish life, but also restoring us to the closeness and communion and intimate relationship with God for which we were created.

Try to nail God down as this Deliverer and Reconciler (an awesome task in and of itself), and God surprises us by touching us and moving amongst us and within us as Guide and Sustainer: not only nudging us along in our daily lives; but also uplifting us and encouraging us along our way, and directing us down paths that we might not choose but that this God assures us is the way we need to go...for this is the way we were created to be and to live, and with whom we were created to be and to live.

And part of this awesome experience of this God whom we come to know and experience in these varying ways, is the realization –and indeed the calling– that we are to reflect in our own lives this same working –this same sharing and supporting and mutuality– that we discern in this One God of Three ‘Persons’.

As Mary Foskett notes,

acknowledg[ing] both the intrarelatational nature of the Divine and the relational nature of God’s interaction with the community of faith. (Professor of Religious Studies, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem NC in *Connections*, “Connecting the Reading with the World,” p.17)

...and, indeed, with the world.

We see this later in our chapter in Genesis with the creation of humankind:

Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image....”

*So God created humans in [God’s] image,
in the image of God [God] created them;
male and female [God] created them.*

(Genesis 1:26a,27 NRSVue)

Karl Barth, the noted 20th century theologian, looked at that verse and declared that the image of God in us is our need for relationships, for community.

“God made us for life in community,” (“A Declaration of Faith” PCUSA; Two(4), 1977, 1991), for God is community.

We are made to be in relationship with God and with each other.

And our relationships with God and with each other are to reflect – to be modeled after – the pattern of the close-knit-ness and support, the partnership and mutuality of the Three ‘Persons’ of the Trinity, the One God whom we seek to know and serve, follow and love.

Yes, I realize that all of this, when we hear it and try to wrap our minds around it, may seem to blow your mind:

- a distinctiveness, yet oneness;
- a partnership we are to emulate;
- a variety and expansiveness we are to embrace.

Yet maybe that ‘blowing-your-mind’ experience is part of the point, and maybe even very close to the point.

For you see, the doctrine of the Trinity is intended to be illuminating and enlightening.

But maybe, in its way, it is also supposed to be confusing.

And that, too, is truth.

We call it mystery.

“The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God,” we hear in the response of the Study Catechism.

yet they are not three gods, but one God in three persons. We worship God in this mystery. (Study Catechism of the PCUSA, Question 76, 1998)

Once again, Oliver Larry Yarbrough offers helpful insight:

Matthew introduces the passage with the observation that when the disciples saw Jesus they “worshiped him,” noting, however, that “some doubted” (v.17).

After referencing several other passages in Matthew where people doubted, or wondered, or weren't quite sure and had 'little faith', as Matthew terms it, Yarbrough notes,

Significantly, in all of these passages Jesus encourages those of little faith; he does not belittle them. Later the disciples who doubted when they saw the resurrected Jesus were among the disciples who were sent to make disciples. Thus, it should be reassuring for both the preacher and the congregation that worshiping on Trinity Sunday does not require full understanding of Trinitarian theology. [-pew!-] Worship that recognizes the grace, love, and communion that define the triune God is more than enough to sustain us both to be and to make disciples.... (*Connections*, p.15)

One God in Three 'Persons'.

A mystery. A revealed mystery, yes – but still a mystery.

Maybe it is like any good relationship: one we grow into and grow with, living and learning along the way, always knowing that there is more to this mystery – and this 'other/Other' – than we know, or ever will know.

Still, it is a mystery that we pursue, in good faith – or attempted good faith.

Even as this Mystery pursues us, in love.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

***HYMN** “Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud” GtG 11

**1. Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud,
Fortress, Fountain, Shelter, Light,
Judge, Defender, Mercy, Might,
Life whose life all life endowed:
May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth behind them all
is the God whom we proclaim.**

**2. Word and Wisdom, Root and Vine,
Shepherd, Savior, Servant, Lamb,
Well and Water, Bread and Wine,
Way who leads us to I AM:
May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth behind them all
is the God whom we proclaim.**

(continued...)

**3. Storm and Stillness, Breath and Dove,
Thunder, Tempest, Whirlwind, Fire,
Comfort, Counselor, Presence, Love,
Energies that never tire:
May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth behind them all
is the God whom we proclaim.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**We trust in Jesus Christ,
fully human, fully God.
We trust in God,
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**One: ...God, for your wondrous work...
All: ...hear our thanks and praise.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Traditional)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**For all that you have given us,
we thank you, gracious God.
For day and night, evening and morning,
for land and sea, for fish and birds,
plants and animals, for humankind,
and for your Son, who came among us
with the gift of life abundant.
Let your Holy Spirit abide in our midst
and work through our gifts,
that all people may have joy and peace in knowing you. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Womb of Life and Source of Being” GtG 3

- 1. Womb of life and source of being,
home of every restless heart,
in your arms the worlds awakened;
you have loved us from the start.
We, your children, gather 'round you,
at the table you prepare.
Sharing stories, tears, and laughter,
we are nurtured by your care.**

- 2. Word in flesh, our brother Jesus,
born to bring us second birth,
you have come to stand beside us,
knowing weakness, knowing earth.
Priest who shares our human struggles,
Life of Life and Death of Death,
risen Christ, come stand among us,
send the Spirit by your breath.**

- 3. Brooding Spirit, move among us;
be our partner, be our friend.
When our memory fails, remind us
whose we are, what we intend.**

(continued...)

**Labor with us; aid the birthing
of the new world yet to be,
free of servant, lord, and master,
free for love and unity.**

**4. Mother, Brother, holy Partner;
Father, Spirit, Only Son:
we would praise your name forever,
one-in-three and three-in-one.
We would share your life, your passion,
share your word of world made new,
ever singing, ever praising,
one with all, and one with you.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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